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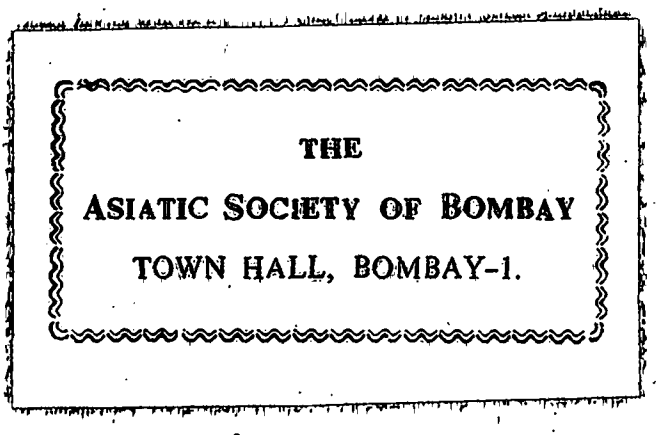


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A

# SERIES

OF

# DISCOURSES,

ON THE

## PRINCIPLES OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF,

AS CONNECTED WITH

## HUMAN HAPPINESS

AND

## IMPROVEMENT.

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BY

THE REV. R. MOREHEAD, A. M.

OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD; JUNIOR MINISTER OF THE EPISCOPAL CHAPEL, COWGATE, EDINBURGH.

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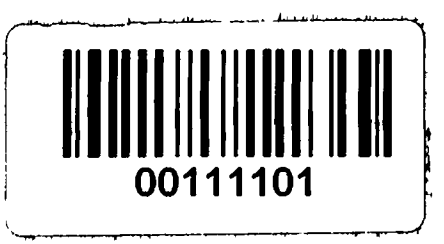

TO

THE REVEREND

A[redacted]. ALISON, L. L. B. F. R. S.

LOND. AND EDIN.

PREBENDA[redacted]Y OF SARUM, &c. &c. AND SENIOR MINISTER OF THE [redacted]ISCOPAL CHAPEL, COWGATE, EDINBURGH,

*These [redacted]Discourses, which owe any little merit they m[redacted]ay possess chiefly to their being faint copies [redacted]f that model of excellence exhibited in his ow[redacted], are inscribed, with sentiments of the utmost [redacted]admiration and gratitude, by his faithful and [redacted] affectionate colleague and friend,*

*THE AUTHOR.*

# PREFACE.

IT [illegible] sign, in the following Disco[illegible] hibit a view both of the eviden[illegible] he effects of religious belief, [illegible] more simple and popular tha[illegible] ually been attempted; and witho[illegible] ing the reader with controversy, [illegible] erwhelming him with facts, to fix [illegible] ention upon those great principles [illegible] in the Constitution of Man, and in [illegible] visible administration of Providence, [illegible] hat seem to lead most directly to a sens[illegible] of the truth and the benefits of religion.

Much has been written, both recently and in older times, upon this most important of all subjects; and [illegible]ounds of our faith have been [illegible]ed by many eminent divines a[illegible]ophers, with a force of reas[illegible]n [illegible]extent of learning, to which [illegible]pro-bable, can now be a[illegible]pplied. These profound and ar[illegible]e writers, however, are not al[illegible]ligible, and are but rarely attracti[illegible]e multitude whom they would [illegible] from error; and vainly multiply [illegible] proofs and refutations, to an aud[illegible]whom they have not engaged to be [illegible]ve.

To me it has always app[illegible]d, that the greater part of those wh[illegible]e indifferent to the truths of religion, [illegible]ve been left in this state rather through an indo-

lent misapprehension of its true nature and general foundations, than from the effect of any positive error, or false creed of philosophy. Controversy, or formal argument, therefore, will have but little effect upon them, and their cure is to be effected, not by *topical* applications of detailed proof, or special refutation, but by the general *tonics* of more enlightened and comprehensive views, as to the nature of man and of the universe,—arguments that point out the connection and consonancy between religion and all that we know or feel of existence,—and reflections which tend to cultivate those dispositions which lay the foundations of religious belief, not only in our understanding, but our affections.

It has sometimes appeared to me also, that many of our orthodox writers have assumed too severe and contemptuous a tone towards those whom they laboured to convert; and have employed a certain haughty sternness of manner, which is not perhaps altogether suitable to the mildness of the gospel of peace, and which has at any rate an obvious tendency to indispose many from listening to their instructions. The antagonists of religion, accordingly, have *not failed to* take advantage of these errors; and have spared no pains to render their productions smooth, easy, and agreeable. "*Fas est et ab hoste doceri*;" and there really seems to be no reason why the children of this world should *always* be wiser in their generation, than the children of light.

Such is the object of these Discourses: of the execution the public must judge. I have ventured to give them the title of "a series;" because, though they were written at different times, and without any precise view to their present arrangement, they seem to have such a mutual coherence and dependency, as to be read with advantage in the order in which they now stand. At all events, it is hoped, they will appear to possess at least that "uniformity of thought and design which (to use the words of the admirable Butler,) will always be found in the writings of the same person, when he writes with simplicity, and in earnest."

R. M.

*Edinburgh,*
*17th December* 1808.

## ERRATA.

P. 38. *for* are merly, *read* merely are
78. *for* wordly, *read* worldly
118. *for* instinct, *read* instincts
134. *for* its, *read* his
136. *for* intervowen, *read* interwoven
140. *for* seemed, *read* seem
156. *for* wordly, *read* worldly
213. *for* world ; to quit, *read* world, to quit
232. *for* exemplification, *read* exemplifications
257. *for* enabled, *read* unable
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# SERMON I.

## ON THE CHARACTER OF RELIGION.

1. KINGS, xix. 12.

*" And after the fire, a still small voice."*

I NEED scarcely remind you, my brethren, that these are the concluding words of that very sublime passage in which the Divine Presence is represented as being made known to the prophet Elijah. *" Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind, an earthquake; but the Lord was*

*not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake, a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave.*"

A passage of this kind is, in itself, an evidence of the inspiration of Scripture. All the circumstances of the description are in a style of thought superior to the course of human ideas, and appear to be the result of those lofty conceptions of the divine nature which can be communicated only by the Spirit of God. The most terrific images from the natural world are first introduced: but they are introduced merely for the sake of contrast, and to heighten the mysterious solemnity of the circumstance which follows. The prophet, we may suppose, witnessed the great and strong wind, the earthquake, and the fire, with emotions

suited to the contemplation of those tremendous ministers of ruin: Yet these were but natural agents, parts of the constituted order of things; the servants, not the Lord. It was not till the "*still small voice*" signified the presence of another Being,—of a Being distinct from nature, and speaking with the composure of irresistible power, amidst all the confusion and havoc of the elements, that Elijah is described as having felt the peculiar emotion of religious awe,—that he "*wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave.*"

But to dilate upon these circumstances would tend rather to weaken than increase their effect. It will be a more useful employment to notice some views of religion which, by an easy interpretation, may appear to be silently pointed at in this remarkable passage. To look for hidden meanings in the Sacred Writings

is, indeed, in most instances, both idle and injudicious. The imagination, in such inquiries, has so wide a field, and may so readily be betrayed into delusive views, that we ought to be very cautious lest we fasten upon the simplicity of Scripture the wandering reveries of an enthusiastic mind. Yet, in some passages, more may be meant than meets the ear. A still small voice may whisper from them great and important truths.

The description before us appears to me to contain a beautiful intimation of the character of true religion, as opposed to Superstition on the one hand, and Infidelity on the other. In the first of these aspects we may suppose it particularly addressed to the Jews, who, notwithstanding all the instructions of Moses and the Prophets, were unaccountably prone to the lowest and most contemptible superstitions. In the time

of Elijah, in particular, there was a very general apostacy from the true religion; the altars of God were deserted for those of Baal. "*I have been very jealous,*" says he "*for the Lord God of Hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy Prophets with the sword, and I, even I only am left.*"

Now, the rise of Idolatry and Superstition may very naturally be traced to that disposition, so deeply rooted in unenlightened minds, of supposing every part of nature to be endowed with sentiment and passion; and, as the unity and connection which run through the whole scheme are not so apparent as to draw the attention of a barbarian, he will commonly be induced to regard every detached appearance as the indication of a separate being, which, according to the character of his own mind, he will invest with

gloomy or with cheerful attributes. It is likewise a feature in human nature to be inattentive to what is common, however great and stupendous it may be in reality, and to bestow admiration only on what is new and surprising. The feeling of dread and apprehension too, excited by unexpected exertions of terrible power, operates on the mind of uninstructed man far more powerfully than that of gratitude for familiar and accustomed bounty; and he is more disposed to tremble before the destructive energies of nature, than to confide in the harmony and mildness of its ordinary administration.

From these observations, however briefly stated, a reflecting mind will easily be enabled to discover in what manner a plurality of gods is so common a tenet in the superstition of barbarous nations: why the Deity is rather supposed to be traced

in the irregular convulsions of nature than in its steady uniformity; and in what way the mind is more inclined to fix on the gloomy and horrible, than on the amiable and conciliating views of religion. The force of these remarks cannot be more comprehensively expressed than in the imagery of the passage we are considering. The mind of untutored man looks for its gods in the great and strong wind, in the earthquake, and in the fire; while it is deaf to the still small voice which speaks from all the corners of creation. The lesson conveyed to the Jews in this description was therefore of the most striking kind. God, they were told, was *not* in the wind, in the earthquake, or in the fire. These convulsions of nature, however stupendous, were not to be regarded as manifestations of Deity; still less, therefore, could they conceive him included in any limited bodily form.

Traces of him they might find everywhere; but he himself was nowhere to be seen.—"*Behold,*" says Job, "*I go forward but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.*"—They were, in fact, told, that it is Superstition alone which seeks to embody the Deity, and to fix him in any particular department of his works, or supposes that he is chiefly to be found in the midst of noise and fury and desolation; and that it is true religion and philosophy which traces through all the mechanism of nature, and in all the course of events, silent marks of the Divine hand, —which, without pretending to find himself, bends before the footsteps of Deity, and listens with sacred composure to the still small voice that speaks from the harmony and order of the universe.

So far, then, the description before us may be supposed to reprove idolatry and every form of superstition, and, in this light, to have been admirably calculated for the instruction of that people to whom it was originally addressed. But it may convey a wider lesson, and one more adapted to a philosophical and inquisitive age. Men are not now much disposed to see God in the wind, in the earthquake, or in the fire. The bent of the present times is not to superstition. Inquiries are made, and made with admirable success, into the natural causes of things; and many appearances which, to the mind of a savage, might seem completely miraculous, are discovered to follow from the common laws of nature. The proper tendency of such inquiries is, to throw light upon the plan of the universe; to discover, the farther they are conducted, more traces of wisdom and benevolence

in nature, and to confirm the proofs of religion. But on some minds they have a different effect; and, resting in second causes, some men seem to overlook the existence of the Supreme Cause of all. Not finding him in the wind, in the earthquake, or in the fire, such inquirers are sometimes led to conclude, that God is not anywhere to be discovered in nature; and thus philosophers have not unfrequently run into almost the same delusion with that which misleads the meanest and least instructed barbarian.

The errors of both proceed on the same gross and vulgar conceptions of religion;—on the supposition that God, if anywhere, is, in a manner, to be seen or touched. The only difference is, that the savage fancies he sees him, while the atheist is blind. In opposition to both these delusions, the words of the text point out beautifully the nature of the proofs for

religion.—"*After the fire, a still small voice.*" The general sentiment is, that God does not obtrude himself on our notice. "*No man has seen God at any time.*" Even the proofs of his existence and attributes, however irresistible when attended to, are not of such a nature as to force themselves on the careless and unthinking. There is a voice, indeed, and a voice which may at all times be heard. "*Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge: there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.*" Yet it is "*a still small voice.*" In fact, too, though this has not been sufficiently noticed, it is always heard, but men do not always attend to its import. There is not a man in existence who does not constantly perceive, and invariably act upon the supposition that nature is an established system or plan; but few men consider as they ought, and some appear

to forget entirely that a plan, by the very force of the term, implies an author or designer. The very regularity of nature,—the very constancy of its laws, makes us lose sight of Him who ordered and disposed it. The voice is so unvarying in its sound, that it scarcely affects the ear.

The lesson, then, which we ought to receive from this fact is, that the proofs of religion are not hastily and presumptuously to be judged of. Wherever the voice seems to sound, wherever to the ear of reason and reflection a hint on this important subject is conveyed, let man listen with reverence, and be ready to receive instruction. Let him not vainly suppose that the voice has ceased to sound because he has ceased to hear it; that the language of nature does not convey the same import, although he has forgot the interpretation.

So much it may be sufficient to have said on religion in a speculative view; but mere speculative views of religion are of no importance unless they lead to practice. Religion, as it influences practice, has the same general character which we have attempted to explain: Here, too, it is "*a still small voice.*" It must contend with the internal convulsions in the mind of man, the fury of his passions, his worldly principles, and innumerable corruptions. It must oppose the seduction of present objects, and point to the riches of futurity. No wonder, then, my brethren, that it is so often either not heard at all, or heard only to be stifled and overpowered. Yet, whether we hear it or no, it still speaks, and will make itself be heard at one time or another. It will be heard in adversity or in death, if it is unattended to in the hours of prosperity, and in the gay presumption of life. Or even if we

should succeed in drowning its voice entirely in this world, it will be heard to speak terrible things in the world which is to come.

How important, then, is the endeavour to listen now to its gentle but solemn call—that call which invites us to tread the paths of peace and wisdom, which seeks to win our souls from those vanities by which they are misled, and points to honour and immortality as their true pursuit and their glorious reward. To those who hear the call and obey it, it will prove a constant source of comfort. Although adversity may assail, and friends forsake them, yet the voice which they cheerfully follow will speak peace and consolation to their hearts. As they advance in life, and see more of the plan of providence, its sounds will continually become clearer and more distinct; on the bed of death they will swell into a note of

triumph; and finally, in better worlds will be heard to utter those welcome words:- "*Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*"

# SERMON II.

## ON THE CHARACTER OF SCRIPTURE.

ST JOHN, V. 39.

*"Search the Scriptures."*

"*THE heavens,*" says the Psalmist, "*declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work.*" This is the universal revelation which "*is gone out through all the earth, and to the end of the world.*" To us who, from our earliest years, have been taught to observe those manifestations of Deity, they seem to be so simple, so beautiful, and so conclusive, that we are sometimes disposed to undervalue every other source of

religious instruction. When we reflect, however, my brethren, it cannot but occur to us, that those traces of the divine hand, which to us appear so distinct, are beheld without any emotion by the greatest portion of the human race: that the sun rises upon many regions without reminding the unthinking inhabitants of that eternal fountain of light from whence he sprung; and that the savage may say of the book of nature, as he has said of the book of revelation, that "it speaks not to him." Nor can we ascribe it to the progress of reason and philosophy alone that the simple truths of natural religion are so clearly discerned by our eyes; for there have been ages before us, distinguished for the highest mental superiority; ages to which we still look back with reverence approaching to adoration,—that yet, in point of religious knowledge or sentiment, were

scarcely at all advanced beyond the miserable ignorance and superstition of barbarians.

Without denying the influence of other causes, it is therefore by no means hardy in us to affirm, that the perfection of natural religion is greatly to be imputed to the progress of revelation; and that the truths taught in the book of the Scriptures have at least tended to open the eyes of men to those sublime lessons which nature herself may convey to them. This indeed would be going but a little way, and it would be betraying our trust to say, that these sacred oracles contain only a more perfect species of Deism. The truths which they peculiarly teach are those which our Saviour refers to in the words immediately following the text: "*Search the scriptures* (says he) *for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.*" It is through

them that man becomes well instructed in the doctrines of immortality and salvation, that he learns his superiority to the fleeting things of the world, and perceives the relation in which he stands to that great person who undertook and accomplished the work of his redemption. My present intention, however, is not to enter into any particular consideration of those great doctrines revealed to us in scripture, and which are only to be found there: I propose, from the words of the text, to draw your attention rather to a more general series of reflections, founded on the beautiful truth conveyed to us in the assertion that there are scriptures open to our search, and that the Author of our Being has, in a peculiar manner, deigned to hold communion with man.

In entering upon this point, allow me first to suggest to you, that human nature has always seemed to require some

communication of this kind. However beautiful the instances of divine goodness and providence displayed in the works of creation, yet they are not quite adapted to satisfy our hearts. Although he is near, and round about us, yet the Author of our Being seems somehow to be remote from us: we enjoy, indeed, the fruits of his bounty; we even seem to hold a conspicuous place among his works:—Yet nature is so vast a system; every thing around us is so prodigious and great, that the notion of our insignificance cannot but overwhelm us, and we seek for some more touching assurances than the "*still small voice*" of nature conveys to our ear, that we are not overlooked and forgotten in the immensity of creation.

It is this feeling which probably has operated as one cause to give birth to all that monstrous assemblage of superstitions which degraded the ancient

world, and which now appear to us so extraordinary and unaccountable. Amidst all the folly and abomination which may attach to them, they yet occur to us in this view as a very interesting picture in the history of our species. They were the attempts,—the vain, the erring, the disappointed, but the earnest and persevering attempts—of the creature to approach its Creator; of a being who felt the sublimity of his nature, however clouded and obscured, to advance to the source from which he sprung; and who, amidst the disasters and melancholy of human life, sought consolation from a more direct intercourse with the great Universal Spirit, the Father of his existence.

It is sometimes the fashion with philosophical inquirers to ridicule, in the superiority of their own knowledge and reason, the simplicity of the savage who

"sees God in clouds, and hears him in the wind:" but perhaps they would find upon consideration, that however he may err in the course which he pursues, yet the sentiment which guides him is congenial to the heart of man; and if these inquirers have lost it amidst the pride of system and reasoning, they are only perhaps more liable than he to the charge of error and delusion.

This sentiment, then, being natural to man, let us, in the second place, consider how beautifully it is met in the volume of the Scriptures. However unexpected many things in that book may be, however little they may suit the taste of a refined age, yet this must be allowed to them, that in every page they meet this sentiment of our nature. They meet it in all its forms, and they are only perhaps the more truly divine, inasmuch as they meet it with a peculiar condescen-

sion, suited to all the varying circumstances of the human race. In the language of St Paul, "*they are made all things to all men, that they may by all means save some.*" In the early parts of the sacred records in particular, we find many narratives which to us appear rude, and adapted only to the conceptions of a barbarous age. The Deity seems to condescend to the wishes of his creatures in a manner that may appear to contradict the lofty and exalted views which we are now taught to form of his nature. Yet, my brethren, in all such scenes, the thing which must strike us most is the fact of the divine condescension; and in the simple narrative of angels sitting down at the table of a patriarch, or conducting by the hand, from the impending ruin of a guilty city, the tottering steps of age and of female irresolution; or of God foretelling in dreams the for-

tunes of individuals and of nations; we ever distinguish the same invariable characters of his watchful and "most visible providence." Even when we read of that perplexed and laborious law which was only the shadow of good things to come, which was imposed upon the stiff necks of a rebellious people, and which confined, under the trammels of authority, men who were incapable of judging right: when we go on to contemplate the light which was occasionally imparted during the progress of this dark and mysterious dispensation to the glowing minds of holy prophets; and, finally, when we behold the arrival of Him who sealed up the law and the prophecy, who proclaimed the salvation of God to all mankind, and who confirmed his doctrines by his blood; however, in all these passages, many things strange and unlooked for may occur, yet one

thing is most remarkable, which runs through them all, and which the heart of man is most anxious to find, the assiduous care and attention bestowed upon the interests of the human race by that almighty and incomprehensible Being "*who inhabiteth eternity.*"

Here, then, we find the natural wishes of the human soul met in all their extent, and in a manner greatly beyond expectation; we find the Sovereign of Nature descending from his inaccessible throne, and conversing with man as a friend; we find him commanding, encouraging, intreating, and using every possible endeavour to raise the eyes of men to that better kingdom "*wherein dwelleth righteousness.*" It is no longer the silent and invisible Governor of the Universe, enshrined in his own majesty, whom we contemplate at a distance, it is one who sympathizes with all the wishes of the

beings whom he has formed, and who, in his last and most remarkable manifestation of himself, when he "*spoke to us by his Son*,"—"*the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person*," formed an union with his people so close and condescending, that the Creator seemed for a time to be lost in the creature.

It is thus that, in a manner inconceivably beautiful, the revealed word of God has supplied every thing that was defective in the voice of nature; and this, if no other consideration were to be added, would be a sufficient call upon us to search and study it with thankfulness and diligence. In pursuing the same train of thought, however, let me, in the third place, suggest to you the great accession of happiness and of virtue which these sacred writings have been the means of introducing among the human race: happi-

ness which is to be found where men least look for it, and virtue where it has least outward encouragement—in the bosoms of those who are unknown to the world, and who are often in the lowest and apparently the most unfortunate circumstances. "*Not many wise men after the flesh* (says the Apostle) *not many mighty, not many noble are called.*" Those whom the world regards with admiration and envy as the favourites of fortune, and the great monopolizers of the happiness of their species,—how often, alas! do they miss that true joy which is found and relished by those who are commonly regarded as the victims of wretchedness! The humble widow, whose nightly pillow is moistened with her tears; the poor man in his unnoticed cottage; the sinner whose conscience is wounded with repentance; the miserable of every description, whose hearts are not harden-

ed and debased, find in the consolations of the Spirit of God that comfort and well-grounded hope, which the pride of learning or abilities, or wealth, or power, so often seeks for in vain! While now, as in all former ages, some are plying the beaten road of crime and conquest, flaming for a time the passing meteors of their age, how many, in the retired vale of unregarded privacy, are deriving, from the volume of salvation, those principles of true ambition, which will enable them at last to "*shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever!*"

There is something inexpressibly striking in the reflection, that the great Sovereign of the Universe, that mysterious Being whom philosophy has so often searched after in vain, deigns, in the pages of inspiration, to converse with the lowest and humblest of his creatures; that those who are ignorant of every thing

else, may yet here be instructed by him who knoweth all things, in those points which it is chiefly material for them to know; that "*to the poor the gospel is preached;*" and that the "*High and Holy One who inhabiteth eternity,* here condescends to *dwell with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.*"

These reflections, my brethren, will, I trust, be thought not entirely unworthy of your attention, and they will perhaps have some tendency to awaken a greater regard to the instructions contained in the sacred writings than it is usual with many to bestow upon them. Every thing, indeed, may be overdone; and the religious views of men, if confined to any one direction, may lead into a narrow manner of thinking, and into confined and illiberal sentiments. Scripture, like every thing else, is liable to very extraordinary interpretations; and when men

enter upon the study of it with a disposition to search into mysteries, or with a prepossession for any peculiar set of tenets, and a desire to establish these in preference to every other, they no doubt may run into the most extravagant imaginations, and find, in the words of God himself, something like a colour for all the perversions and follies of their own disordered minds. The disposition for receiving most advantage from the scriptures is that which I have attempted to shew—Scripture was designed to meet the humble but earnest wish natural to the human heart, to become acquainted with God, to receive instruction from him, to be comforted with the consolations of his Spirit, and with the hopes of immortality.

To these leading points all doctrines and peculiar tenets of faith are subservient; and those are probably the best

suited to every particular person, which the most readily conduct his mind to the knowledge of these sublime truths. "*All scripture* (says St Paul) *is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works:*" "*but* (as he says in another place) *avoid foolish questions, and genealogies and contentions, and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and vain.*"

# SERMON III.

## ON THE CHARACTER OF WISDOM.

PROV. xvii. 24.

*"Wisdom is before him that hath understanding, but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth."*

IT is the object of the writings of Solomon to point out the superiority of wisdom to every other human acquisition. "*Wisdom* (says he) *is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom, and; with all thy getting, get understanding.*" Not that he ever undervalues the common objects

of human pursuit, such as riches, power, or pleasure: his only aim is to enforce a lesson which long experience had taught him,—that to a man who is unwise these advantages are really of very small importance, and that a wise man can at all times reconcile himself to the want of them.

Two questions, however, here present themselves: What is wisdom, and in what manner may it be attained? To the first of these inquiries, the answer of Solomon is in these words; "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.*" Or, in other words, man is then wise, and then only, when, with a sense of the obligation which he is under to do so, he endeavours to discover, and to carry into effect, the design of God in his creation.

But it may be asked, no doubt, how is this discovery to be made? What is clear

amidst the contradictions of human reason? What distinct rules even of morality are to be found amidst the varying customs and opinions of men? When we leave our own narrow circle, and look into "*the ends of the earth*," where shall we find nations agree in their views, even of the duties of social life? But if we proceed further, and examine the opinions of men on religious subjects, into how wide a field of contradiction and extravagance do we run? Where, then, are truth or wisdom to be found.

To this class of inquiries, the answer of the wise man is contained in the text. "*Wisdom is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.*" As if he had said; "Give a cautious heed to the feelings of your conscience, and to the opinions of the wise, and the upright among whom you live, and you will seldom go far wrong in your

views of duty and morality. Bestow in like manner a prudent attention on that form of religious faith in which you have been brought up; and if in the course of your life you may happen to attain more liberal and enlightened opinions than you received from your first instructors, yet be persuaded that, in the main, these are the instructions which have conveyed to you some of the most important truths which in this world you can ever learn." "*My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother, for they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.*" If you have had understanding, moral and religious wisdom have at all times been before you, and within your reach; it is merely folly, though you may sometimes have thought it the mark of an unprejudiced and philosophical mind,

to send your eyes in search of them to the "*ends of the earth.*"

Such, my brethren, is the simple and unassuming wisdom delivered in the instructions of this wise king! How different in its character from much of what is called wisdom in the present age,—from the course which philosophy has too frequently pursued; and how different in its effects from that misery and loss of all steady principle into which the wretched votaries of modern infidelity have been too often betrayed! There are two positions which the text leads me to illustrate: the first is, that every thing which it is most important for us to know, either in morals or religion, lies before us, and may be attained without any deep inquiry; the second is, that when more profound or extensive inquiries upon such subjects are resorted to by the wise, it is never with the view of opposing, but

of adding farther confirmation to those great and fundamental truths. The illustration of these positions will, I trust, be of some advantage to those of the younger part of our congregation, who may at this time * be employed in an examination of the evidences of religion, whether natural or revealed.

In the first place, then, let those who are entering upon such inquiries consider, that, from the nature of the thing, they are not necessarily very deep or profound. Morals and religion are the business, and constitute the wisdom of all mankind,—of the unlearned as well as of the learned, of the peasant as well as the philosopher. But what it is the business of all men to know, no man can know well, unless it is made in some degree apparent to his reason; and before the

* The season of Advent.

principles of morality or of religion can be of material service to any human being, his reason must to a certain extent be convinced of their truth.

It is the fashion with freethinkers to suppose, that the religious opinions of the lower orders are merely prejudice and superstition; that their imaginations are merly affected, but that their reason remains unconvinced; and they accordingly often talk of these plain simple people in a strain of ridicule and contempt which is much more applicable to themselves. The fact, however, undoubtedly is, that although in the religion of an uneducated man, there is commonly some mixture of superstition, yet, in as far as it serves him for a rule of wise and upright conduct here, and affords him well-founded hopes of happiness hereafter, it is in the highest degree reasonable; and it is the pride and

glory of religion, that, in the lowest circumstances of human fortune, it has trained up men to act a wise, a worthy, and a noble part, to which no lessons of human philosophy have effected any thing similar or comparable, even while they were assisted by all the advantages of knowledge and education. Now, what I mean to assert is, that principles which lie level to men of very imperfect education, may be found without any deep inquiry, and when they are overlooked, as they unfortunately have been by many ingenious men, it is rather from their simplicity and plainness than from their abstruseness and difficulty. It is too often the miserable weakness of men of genius, that they will not accept of the wisdom which is before them, but, rather than be satisfied with so cheap a purchase, will permit their eyes to travel with those of

the fool in the text, into "*the ends of the earth.*"

What, for instance, so simple to every thinking person, or so congenial to every uncorrupted heart, as the fundamental truth of all religion, the belief of the existence of God? What so natural as the sentiments of devotion which rise from the contemplation of his perfections? What, in like manner may I add, so easily comprehended as the more important doctrines of revelation? That a teacher came from God to instruct mankind: that he delivered the purest precepts, and exhibited the model of every virtue in his life: that he conversed with man as a friend and brother: that he died to take away the sting and the bitterness of death: and that he rose again to exhibit to man a living proof of the final victory of human nature over death and the grave. There is a congeniality be-

tween such views and the natural sentiments of religion, and they supply so well some points which the religion of nature leaves obscure, that an unprejudiced man, it would seem, should have no great difficulty in admitting them, and should require no very great body of evidence for the purpose of establishing their truth.

The evidence for natural religion rests on the simple and quiet contemplation of nature: the leading evidence for revelation is founded in the consciousness of our spiritual wants, and in the unstrained interpretation of Scripture, which, without any trick of rhetoric, or any affectation of laborious proof, speaks immediately to the heart and the understanding, and founds its evidence and authority on the weight and dignity of the truths which it delivers. "*Wisdom then*," my brethren, "*is before him*

*that hath understanding;*" not merely the wisdom of time, but the wisdom of eternity; not merely the rules of common prudence, but the paths of everlasting salvation.

The second position which I undertook to illustrate, is, that profound or extensive inquiries may frequently add confirmation to moral and religious truths, but are never resorted to by the wise, from any view of opposition to these truths.

It was not certainly the intention of Solomon, to interrupt the inquiries and speculations of the human mind: nor, when he affirms that "*the eyes of the fool are in the ends of the earth,*" does he at all mean to insinuate, that the wise should not likewise look abroad upon nature, and employ their eyes upon all that is known of the works of God, or of the history of man. The wise, however, are actuated in their inquiries, by principles diametri-

cally opposite to those of the fool. They seek not to oppose the truths upon which the happiness and the dignity of man depend, but to confirm them. Whatever may be the seducing power of ingenious speculation, the wise man will never permit it to overcome the fundamental principles of his conduct, and of his hopes. The proofs on which these rest, are simple and before him: his speculations are drawn, he knows, from a distance, and may be true or false: the first he possesses in common with every human being, before whom these truths have been laid; they are like the air which all men breathe, and the objects which all see: more refined speculations upon such subjects are like inquiries into the composition of the atmosphere, or into the hidden properties of bodies, which, in the hands of the wise, may lead, no doubt, to great and important uses, but which may be

abused by the fool to purposes of mischief and folly.

The wise will never pry into the corners of nature for strange appearances, upon which their ignorance may raise a doubt as to the wisdom and the beneficence of its author. It is their delight, on the contrary, to explain every passage in the great volume of creation, which may render his attributes more admirable to the human mind. Nor, in their examination of the various forms under which religion has appeared among men, do they ever officiously study to conceal the original characters of truth, which run through the whole; or to throw into the dark those features of divinity, which distinguish the religion of Christ from all the other forms of human belief. Such, indeed, are sometimes the melancholy attempts of the fool; or, what is worse, of those men of unfortu-

nate ingenuity, who abuse the gift of God committed to them to their own ruin and that of others. It is, on the other hand, the part of the wise, through all the varying forms of superstition, to trace the workings of the same common religious nature in man—and, amidst the darkness which sits deep over the hopes of the human race, to descry the appearance of that star which gives the promise of a better day, and, "*to rejoice with exceeding great joy*," when it leads them to the place where they may "*fall down and worship him*" who has come to enlighten and to save the world.

These observations, my brethren, as I have already said, are chiefly intended for the young. In that period of life, more than in any other, wisdom seems to be something remote from common observation, and to be found only "*in the ends of the earth*." It is at this period that

we are more attached in our inquiries to ingenuity than to truth; and that, in the fancied liberality and illumination of our views, we are tempted to hold in the utmost contempt every thing which we can class in our imaginations under the aspect of superstition. Under that name, alas! we are too ready to include the most venerable and the wisest opinions; and, on the shrine of popular delusion and folly, to sacrifice all that is truly great, either on earth or in heaven! These, however, whatever they may seem to be, are not the true employments of genius, and are, at all times, most unworthy of an elevated mind.

Go then, my young friends, and fill your minds with all knowledge, and with all science. Let your eyes and your thoughts run into the ends of the earth. Give full scope to that ardour which this seat of liberal education is so well adapt-

ed to inspire and to gratify; but as you value your peace of mind here, and your happiness hereafter, let not the vanity of knowledge lay snares for the principles of your virtue, or your faith. Make philosophy, as she ever ought to be, the handmaid of morality and religion, and she will then supply you with additional confirmations of that wisdom which is ever before you; and your eyes will then have been in the ends of the earth, not like the eyes of fools, but like the eyes of the servants and the children of the most high and all-wise God.

# SERMON IV.

## ON THE CHARACTER OF FAITH.

ST JOHN, XX. 29.

"*Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*"

THESE words, my brethren, convey much useful instruction to those who, like us, live in the latter ages of the Gospel. They are the words of our Lord to St Thomas, occasioned by that singular incredulity with which this apostle received the accounts of his master's resurrection. After

having removed his doubts, by affording him all the evidence which he required, or which the fact was capable of receiving, our Lord reproves him, but in very gentle language, for the want of faith which he had shewn. "*Thomas*, (says he) *because thou hast seen me thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*"

It is evident that we, in this age of the world, stand very much in the situation in which St Thomas stood before our Lord appeared to him. We have not seen,—and yet, I trust, we believe! There are, however, some in this age, who will tell us, that our belief is fallacious and vain; who will deride the promises in which we trust, and affirm that there are no grounds for those hopes which we have set before us. If, at any time, we feel our minds giving way to such representations, or are dazzled by

the plausible ingenuity with which they may be supported, let us call to our recollection the memorable words of our Lord, that although we have not seen,—although we have not received the highest evidences, we are yet blessed if we believe: The words, my brethren, are very affecting, and very important; and I trust, that I shall be usefully employed in drawing from them a few obvious reflections.

In the first place, then, it is apparent, that when our Saviour tells us we are blessed if we believe, he cannot possibly mean to recommend that we should believe any thing which we have not good grounds for believing. He cannot mean that we should take our opinions upon trust, or without making a proper use of that reason which God has given us. We are, on the contrary, expressly required to "*prove all things*," and to be "*ready*

*to give an answer to every man who asketh a reason of the hope that is in us.*" According to the opportunities which we possess, our faith ought always to be established on solid and substantial foundations. But, from the very nature of the thing, these can never amount to the highest possible evidence. What we learn from the testimony of others, is never so certain as what we see with our own eyes. It may, however, be sufficiently certain to be credited or believed; and that mind must be very full of suspicion, which will always require the highest evidence for every species of truth.

This was plainly the case with St Thomas. He had surely been witness to many circumstances in the life of his master which rendered the fact of his resurrection not a very improbable one; and his companions, the apostles, had, with one voice, declared to him, that they had con-

versed with their Lord, and that he was indeed risen from the dead. The hesitation of St Thomas with regard to the truth of this fact was evidently, therefore, very unreasonable, and argued a strange degree of stubborn incredulity. It was possible, certainly, that the apostles might be joined in a plot to deceive him; but this was both an improbable and an unamiable suspicion. He knew well the worth and the veracity of these men; he knew likewise their love for their master, and the extreme consternation and distress which his death had occasioned them; and it was surely most unlikely that, in this temper of mind, they should be so idly and cruelly employed as to attempt to trifle with the feelings of one of their own associates. While, then, our Lord cannot mean to recommend groundless belief, yet he very reasonably recommends belief on such convictions of the under-

standing as have a substantial foundation, although they may not rest on the highest possible evidence.

But, secondly, my brethren, the expression of the text conveys much more. It expresses not merely a simple approbation of such belief as a right and reasonable thing, but it speaks of it in a high strain of commendation. It is not merely said, it is reasonable to believe although ye have not seen, but, "*blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*" In the particular case, therefore, of religious belief (the only case which our Saviour had in view), it appears that there is not merely a reasonableness and propriety, but that there is a high degree of moral excellence. This is a point which it is of consequence to explain, as it seems not to be sufficiently understood: though what I can now say upon the subject must necessarily be very imperfect.

First, then, it may be remarked, that religious belief is the noblest principle of the human soul; and is the feeling to which it instinctively returns whenever it is freed from the seductions of present objects. Whenever the mind comes back upon itself, and reflects for a moment whence it came, and whither it is going,—when it is freed from the current of the world, it then rises as by a natural aspiration after some intercourse and communion with the unseen arbiter of its destiny. There immediately springs up within it a principle of Faith,—a bond of union, which connects it with the unknown and undiscoverable secrets of futurity, and makes it feel that a time is coming when all the objects with which it is now occupied will be of no value in its eye, and that other and greater objects, with which it is now unacquainted, will then fill up the vast measure of its af-

fections. To cultivate this feeling, to keep alive this high sense of our future destiny, to cling to those facts by which it is supported, to apply ourselves with ardour and eagerness to every appearance in nature, and to every relation in history by which it receives confirmation, is a proof of an elevated mind; and so far from being a weakness which we ought to overcome, it is a noble disposition which struggles with the littleness of present pursuits, and strives to lift the soul to a sense of its true dignity. This is one view in which it is blessed to believe; and although our reason certainly could never approve of any unsound or fallacious belief, yet the moral faculty might almost applaud that noble boldness of faith which could cling to religion, even if reason were to oppose it.

But farther, all religious faith that is consistent and sound, evinces a love of

virtue; because when we throw our eyes into a future world, we can never rationally do so without believing that this future world will be the reign of perfection. The mind of man rises beyond the present life, chiefly because it perceives here something incomplete, wrong, and irregularly conducted—it looks into another life, because it there expects that every thing will be well-ordered and completed. It can only look into another life with satisfaction, therefore it can only believe willingly, it can only cling to belief, and accept of any reasonable evidence for believing, if itself is good, if it loves goodness, if it triumphs in the thought that all will yet be well, and that there will be nothing left to offend in the kingdom of God. Faith, therefore, argues a blessed disposition, a disposition which aims at the perfection of all creation, and which longs to behold

the whole universe of being freed from defect, from vice, and suffering.

I shall only add, my brethren, that there is something peculiarly blessed in *Christian* faith, in that disposition of mind which, recognizing the blindness and the weakness of the human heart, seeks a guide to direct its steps, and strength superior to its own on which it may lean; which, sacrificing the pride of man, can fix its eye steadily upon the cross, and can discover the perfection of all that is to be admired and loved in *one* whose external circumstances were mean, and who "*had no beauty that we should desire him.*" There is a purity and an absence of all worldly affections in such faith, that is peculiarly connected with all the best principles of our nature.

From these two reflections, from the reflection that sound faith must always rest upon good grounds, and from the

reflection that there is a moral beauty and blessedness in the disposition of mind which leads to religious belief, we may gather what is the duty of man on this important subject: First, it is our duty to seek such a foundation for our faith as reason will approve of; and, secondly, we must be careful not to let the foundation be shaken when we have secured it. We must not consider religious faith as an indifferent matter, or that it resembles opinions on common subjects, to which it is of little importance whether we are stedfast or indifferent. When we have formed reasonable opinions in religion, we must prize them as the greatest good which we possess, and rather permit the whole world to crumble about our heads than part with one of them. Like other duties, this too may at times be a difficult one. We may be led away from it by the seductions of vanity, by the love of the

world, by the love of philosophy, falsely so called, and by many other attractions. But, in the difficulty itself, there is another source of merit; and the more hard the task may be to keep our faith unshaken, the more blessed are we if we persevere to the end.

In the third place, the words of our Saviour suggest a farther reflection. While faith is *blessed* as a moral quality, it is to be accounted *blessed* likewise in another view. Our faith is not, in most cases, entirely our own work. We owe much to the care of our parents, to the good principles which they have instilled into us; and often, too, we are indebted to happy incidents in the course of our lives, which may well be denominated interpositions of Providence. Our faith then comes from a higher power than ourselves: it is a good gift bestowed upon us—a *blessing* which we have received,

From this view, let us first learn with what temper of mind we ought to regard want of faith in other men. There is, probably, in all instances of infidelity, some degree of vice: in many instances there may be very great and glaring vice, something which it is natural for us to detest and to abhor. But there may be many other instances, and it is to be hoped they are the most frequent, in which there is much more to be regretted and lamented. The lesson which the words of our Saviour in the text, and which the whole incident that gave occasion to them may afford us here, is very striking and beautiful. St Thomas was for a time what is commonly called an infidel. He required an evidence for his faith, which no man in the present age of the world can ever obtain, and which it was unreasonable, and, in some respects, unworthy in him to demand. Yet his Master still

beheld, with a favourable eye, what was really good in this disciple; and, so far from treating him with any harshness or unpleasing severity on account of his unbelief, he condescended to give him the evidence which he required. He scarcely, indeed, reproaches him with his infidelity. His words convey a reproach, but it is of the gentlest and most tacit nature imaginable. He does not say, "Thomas, thou art accursed because thou didst not believe;" he says simply, "*Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed;* blessed *are they that have not seen and yet have believed.*" If this was the temper, and this the language in which our Saviour himself addressed an unbelieving disciple, with what charity and indulgence ought we, his unworthy servants, to treat a brother who has fallen into doubt and perplexity? Instead of driving him from us with anger and im-

patient revilings, we are here directed to lay before him all the evidence in our possession, and, by gentle and persuasive assurances, to win over to the truth, a heart which can only be hardened by scorn, and alienated by reproach.

But farther, my brethren, from the view of faith as a blessing which we have received, the following most important consideration arises: let it not be received in vain. It is not given us for the purpose of lying dead and dormant in our minds, it is given with the design of inspiring us with the love of every thing that is good. It is given with the view of exciting us to all good works; and, in fact, we cannot be said to possess it unless we permit it to obtain its genuine and natural scope. It is given to raise our minds above this world, and to carry our affections into a higher scene. We believe that the present life is but the school

of preparation for an eternal world; that we have no "*abiding city*" here; and that we are advancing to a celestial city, whose "*builder and maker is God.*" We believe that one has gone before us, who came to guide us in our course, who has burst the barriers of the grave, and has "*ascended up on high.*" These are the truths in which our infant years were instructed, and which our maturer judgments have approved; they are the truths which we profess to believe when we assemble round the altar of Christ; and they constitute that faith which is the polar star that directs our voyage through the dark and stormy night of mortality. "*What manner of men, then, ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness;*" and how greatly does it become us to "*hold this mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.*"

# SERMON V.

## ON NATURAL RELIGION.

JOHN, xiv. 8.

"*Philip saith unto him, Lord shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.*"

HOWEVER inattentive to the impressions of religion mankind may generally be, it is probable that there is not a human being in existence who has not, on some occasions of his life, felt the full force of the sentiment in the text. The wise and the ignorant, the busy and the gay, the prosperous and the unfortunate, the good and the bad, have all their hours of

deeper and finer feeling, in which their minds, rising above common pursuits, become sensible that a Father in heaven must be found to complete the measure of their enjoyments, to alleviate their sorrows, and to pardon their sins. The language of Philip, therefore, my brethren, is the language of human nature; and it strikes upon our hearts as the voice of a being who, wandering over a dark world, where error misleads, and where vice betrays, where misery pursues, and where even prosperity cloys, lifts, at times, an anxious eye to the heavens which surround him, and exclaims that all is yet well, that nothing is yet to be complained of, if he can find a Father. "*Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.*"

The answer of our Lord to the request of his disciple is conveyed in language so lofty, and is yet so gentle and conde-

scending, that it could have proceeded from no other than one who, with all the feelings of the Son of Man, knew that he was the Son of God. "*Jesus saith unto him, have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father: and how sayest thou, then, shew us the Father?*" On a future occasion, I propose to examine these words as they apply to him who spoke them. At present it may not be an useless employment of your time, if I point out a more general answer which the request of Philip might have received; an answer not indeed so applicable to the circumstances in which he stood, nor so satisfactory in itself, yet more adapted to the general circumstances of mankind,' and which has at least the advantage of being ever ready at hand, if we will but open our hearts to receive it. There is no absolute ne-

cessity for a messenger from heaven to inform us that we have a Father: whatever we see, or hear, or feel, brings us assurance of this great and consolatory truth; and the sun which blazes above our heads, and "*the moon and the stars which he hath ordained,*" address us in words which "*have gone out through all the earth, and to the ends of the world.*"

There is surely no truth more obvious to the human mind, than that this magnificent universe which we inhabit is an orderly and systematic scene; that there is no confusion or disorder in the great outlines of nature; and the farther philosophy inquires, the more contrivance and artifice it discovers in every minute particular. This is a fact, my brethren; and this suffices us. It shews us the Father; it shews us the mind by which nature is governed; and tells us, in language which

cannot be misunderstood, that wherever we move, Wisdom embraces us.

But it is not merely inanimate nature by which we are surrounded. The world teems with life; and innumerable orders of living beings rejoice in the light of day. It is not design and intelligence alone which the volume of creation offers to our eye. We likewise read in glowing characters the traces of benevolence; and the Father of existence is also the giver of good. Does not this suffice us, my brethren? Or, if man requires more particular proofs that he has a Father, has he not received them? Has he not been made but "*a little lower than the angels, and been crowned with glory and honour? Is he not made to have dominion over the works of the divine hands, and are not all things put under his feet?* Are not the highest sources of happiness opened up to him in the attainment of knowledge, in

his social affections, and in the practice of virtue? Are these, and all the other enjoyments of his nature placed within his reach, and yet can he be blind to the bounty from which they flow? Can he, for a moment, suppose that God careth not for him, or that he is thrown loose upon a world where he is forsaken and neglected?—True: he must often labour with the sweat of his brow; but that seeming curse commonly proves a real blessing.—True: he is subject to pain, to sorrow, and to death; but the rays of patience and hope gild the clouds of his heaviest day, and the best and happiest affections of his nature are called out under the salutary discipline of affliction.

The evils of life are confessedly a dark part of the divine administration; yet we commonly conceive it to be darker than it is, and, unwilling at any time to acknowledge that we re-

quire chastisement, we are too apt to think ourselves harshly dealt with, when we are in truth receiving the most unequivocal proofs of our Father's love.—"*Affliction cometh not forth out of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.*" There are purposes, frequently indeed obscure, which the most severe calamities are intended to answer. There is one purpose which they always may effect, the improvement of our moral nature. Besides the qualities of patience and fortitude, which are exercised only in the season of sorrow and of danger, how often does it happen that our religious sentiments are for the first time acquired, or are fully confirmed in those trying moments alone? And, while the bounty of our heavenly Father is too often received with thoughtless ingratitude, how many fly to him for comfort, when they have no other hope on which they can de-

pend? Shall we speak then of the evils of life as affording a presumption that we have no Father who careth for us, when it is apparent that many of his children discover him only amidst the gloom of those evils? Is it a proof that our Father desires not our good, because he desires that we should find our good only in finding out him?

The inquiry, then, which man on some occasions so earnestly makes, may receive an easy answer. "*Shew us the Father,*" we say, "*and it sufficeth us.*" The answer is, You behold him;—not, indeed, face to face, for can man look on God and live? but you see him in the manner best adapted to your feeble powers, to the station which you hold among his creatures. You behold him in his works; in the happiness of the beings which he has formed; in the course of human affairs; even in the midst of your afflic-

tions. Does not this suffice you? Is it not enough to inspire you with gratitude, to dispel doubt, to enjoin resignation, to awaken hope, and confirm faith?

What proofs or evidences indeed can we desire? Because God does not make himself more fully known to us, shall we not thankfully receive the knowledge which we have? Is it not an immense privilege of our being that we know any thing of the Father at all; and, when we consider the prodigious disproportion between the Creator and the creature, how wonderful is even that little knowledge which we possess? How much this knowledge has been improved by the revelation of Christ, I propose hereafter to explain; but, at present, can we be deaf to the voice of nature herself? and is it possible that we should not behold her august form rising and addressing us in the very same words of tacit

reproof with which our Lord addressed his disciple? "*Have I been so long time with you, and yet have ye not known me? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how say ye, then, shew us the Father?*"

These reflections have been suggested to me from contemplating the character of the age in which we live, as an age of philosophical inquiry. Men are no longer satisfied with surveying the outward appearances of things; they follow nature into her deepest recesses; and, both in the material system and in the course of human affairs, they are eager to explore those leading and general laws, by which many detached and apparently contradictory particulars may be connected and reconciled. The attempt is great my brethren, and worthy of man; and the success which it has met with in every department of human knowledge encourages him to proceed.

Yet why should it have happened, that the noblest of all the occupations in which the mind of man can be engaged, should ever be suspected to have any alliance with the lowest and most degrading imagination which he can form; and why should those whose great object it is to elucidate the fair volume of creation, while, with one hand, they point to the order and wisdom which it displays, be supposed capable of forming the vain and impious design to blot out, with the other, the name of its gracious author? Why should Philosophy and Religion, which are so closely joined, ever be imagined capable of disunion; or why should those who are followers of the one ever miss the path which leads them to the other?

I doubt not that the popular suspicion which pursues the philosophical character, is in a great measure to be ascribed to the mean jealousy of narrow and bi-

gotted opinions; and I know that, in this country at least, there are men, the purity of whose devotion is commensurate with the extent of their science. It is, however, melancholy to reflect, that any foundation should have been given for so black a stigma on the philosophy of our age, that any "stars should have shot madly from their spheres," or that any name which the votaries of science repeat with gratitude and veneration, should be associated in our minds with the dark impressions of impiety. It is sad to think that "*offences have come.*" "*But woe to those by whom the offence cometh!*" These prophetic words have, in our time *, been fulfilled; and in those countries in which the investigations of philosophy have been more productive of pride than of piety, the fury of the sword is at last giving in-

* 1807.

structions which all the beauty and beneficence of nature had inculcated in vain. Driven out from the scene of his domestic repose, a wretched outcast on a miserable world, more than one "dark idolater of chance" is, I doubt not, at this hour raising his eye to heaven, and crying, in the bitterness of his soul, "*shew us the Father.*" Our day, my brethren, is not yet come; and may that paternal arm which has hitherto been held over us, still cover our heads with its protecting shield. Yet the decree may have gone forth, and the hand-writing may already have appeared upon the wall.—"*Thou, too, hast been weighed in the balance, and art found wanting.*"

These reflections call upon us all to be serious. They call upon those who are advanced in life to root out from their minds every sentiment or opinion which may oppose itself to the knowledge of

God, to open their hearts, and to contemplate, with renewed spirits, that mighty display of wisdom and love which everywhere surrounds them. If they have not yet known the Father, these reflections call upon them to know him now; and they send them not to any hidden fountain of knowledge, to any dark inquiry, but to that book of nature which is open to every eye, and which many are so curious to explore. Parents are called upon to impress the principles of piety on the hearts of the young; to "*shew them the Father;*" and while they supply them with the means of instruction in every branch of liberal knowledge, to point out to them those traces of wisdom and benevolence in nature, of which all science is full, and without the perception of which all science is unsatisfactory and dead. Teach your children to have minds superior to that miserable folly

which would represent religion as the refuge only of the weak and ignorant; shew them, by your own example, and by the example of the great and good in every age, that it is the true source of all genuine dignity of mind: Be not too anxious about their success in the paths of wordly ambition, or in the acquisition of external and fallacious accomplishments; inspire them, above all things, with the love of God and of virtue: "*shew them the Father,—and that will suffice them.*"

# SERMON VI.

## ON REVEALED RELIGION.

JOHN, xiv. 9.

"*Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou, then, shew us the Father?*"

THE request of Philip to our Lord, led me, in a former discourse, to point out that reply which it might have received from the suggestions of nature, even if he to whom the request was addressed had

not given the answer which you have now heard. "*Shew us the Father* (said Philip) *and it sufficeth us.*" Nature, as we have seen, might have replied, you behold him "*wherever you live, and move, and have your being:*" in "*the heavens, the work of his fingers, the sun, and the moon, and the stars, which he hath ordained:*" in the earth, which he "*hath founded upon the seas, and established upon the floods:*" in "*the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas:*" in "*man, of whom he is mindful, and the son of man whom he hath visited, whom he hath made a little lower than the angels, and hath crowned with glory and honour.*"

The answer of our Lord to his disciple does not at all supersede this general language of nature to all the children of men; it is, however, a different answer; and to those who are accustomed to de-

rive their religious impressions from natural appearances alone, it may perhaps seem to have been in a great measure superfluous. Yet it was a reply which many wise and good men of former ages had longed to hear, the anticipation of which had brightened the inspirations of ancient prophets and kings, and which we my brethren *, at this hour, when we are preparing to fall down and worship before the humble cradle of him who came into the world to save us, know, I trust, in what manner to prize, and to receive with thankfulness and joy. "*Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou, then, shew us the Father?*"

* Season of Advent.

It will not be expected, nor indeed would it be suitable to the province of the pulpit, that I should take occasion, from these words, to enter into any formal exposition of the evidences of Revelation. It is impossible, however, to neglect the opportunity which they afford me, of making some very general observations, which may be useful to those who are directing their thoughts to this inquiry.

The leading ground upon which those proceed who deny the authority of revelation is, that it is unnecessary ; and that nature and reason can supply us with all the religious knowledge which we require. Now, admitting to those who maintain this opinion, that there is nothing deficient in the intimations concerning God and his laws which we derive from these sources, there still occurs an important observation, which does not

seem to strike them with the force which it deserves. In considering the subject of religion, a material distinction is to be made between what it appears to us *may be* effected by the unassisted powers of the human mind, and what the history of mankind informs us *has been* actually effected by them. The natural evidences of religion may appear *to us* very clear and indisputable; and yet we know that, not two thousand years ago, these evidences were very imperfectly discerned by philosophers themselves, and that mankind in general were involved in the grossest darkness and idolatry.

Supposing, then, that revelation added nothing to the religion of nature, it yet seems to have been necessary for introducing into the world clear and just views of religion, at the time, and in the degree in which it was the intention of Providence that such views should prevail:

nor, certainly, have we any reason to suppose that men would ever have advanced one step in rational opinions on this most important of all subjects, if Christianity had not opened their eyes, and rendered them sensible and ashamed of their folly. Even admitting, therefore, that reason and philosophy might possibly have led men to just notions of religion, this at least is certain, that, in point of fact, they never did so; and that, till the æra of the Christian revelation, the principles of natural religion were almost as little understood, by the bulk of mankind, as the scheme of their future redemption. He, therefore, who spoke the words of the text, may justly claim the praise, that, while these gifts of heaven failed to produce this fruit to the wise themselves, he first shewed the father to the great multitude of mankind.

I do not, however, rest the cause of revelation here. I deny that any description of men, the most enlightened of the human race, can, with any reason, pretend to undervalue the light of Christianity; and the words of our Lord to Philip were not only adapted to the capacity of the unlettered individual to whom they were spoken, but may, at this day, be addressed, with all their original efficacy, to the best instructed and most philosophical of the sons of men. "*He that hath seen me* (says our Lord) *hath seen the Father.*" A few illustrations of the import of these expressions will, I believe, fully establish the assertion which I have now made.

In the first place, then, our Saviour "*shewed the Father,*" by exhibiting in human nature a model of divine perfection. It is here, probably, that natural religion is most obviously defective. Man feels

that he is unworthy of his Maker; and cannot form to himself any distinct or satisfactory ideas of the being to whom he is eager to approach. Nature, indeed, is grand and harmonious, and reflects, at least from her great outlines, the image of the majesty and the goodness of God; but man is conscious in himself of disorder and corruption; and the "*still small voice*" of nature is not heard amidst the earthquakes, the tempests, and the fires which lay waste the human mind. It is this feeling which has given birth to most of the extravagancies of superstition. Unable to resist the impulse which calls upon him to bend before invisible power, yet incapable, from his own imperfections, of forming any just conception of the God whom it becomes him to adore, man at all times, instead of exhibiting in himself the image of his Maker, has represented the divine nature under the infinite va-

riety of images suggested by his own weakness, ignorance, and vices. Before, therefore, he could become acquainted with God, it seemed to be necessary that he should himself appear in a form worthy of the Deity; nor could the Father be revealed to him, while there was no example in human nature of "*that beloved Son in whom the Father might be well pleased.*"

Here, then, revelation supplies us with a link which was wanting in the chain of religious truth, and without which religion cannot be rendered firm and indissoluble in the human soul. It is in the person of our Saviour alone, that the connection between man and his Maker can distinctly be traced; that the gulph which separates the Creator from his imperfect creature is filled up; and that man now feels the strong and unbroken chain

which connects him with the throne of God, and the treasures of eternity.

How necessary this bond of union is, will appear clearly from the history of errors in religion, both in ancient and modern times. The prevailing error of ancient times was idolatry; which, as I have already explained, rose, in a great measure, from the indistinct and wandering conceptions of the divine nature at that time incident to the mind of man. Christianity banished idolatry forever from the world; and this species of error cannot now mislead those who depart from the faith of the Gospel. They are, however, liable to errors fully as monstrous, and perhaps more pernicious. It seldom happens that those who abandon Christianity settle in any rational form of natural belief; and, when they do, their systems are invariably borrowed from that revelation which they pretend to un-

dervalue. The melancholy history of the philosophy of our times, however, will inform us, that they much more frequently run into the thoughtless indifference of scepticism, or even into the horrible perversion of blind and determined atheism. The bond of Christianity being broken, the mind is thrown loose to its own extravagant chimeras, and the pretender to philosophy now, no less than the savage in former times, although in a manner more perverse and laborious, loses sight of the Father.

I know not, my brethren, whether, in these observations, I have made myself completely understood: the leading idea, however, upon which they proceed is, I believe, perfectly just,—that natural religion is defective, inasmuch as it leaves a wide and gloomy chasm between man and his Maker, in consequence of the imperfections and vices of the human

character; and that this chasm is filled up by the form of perfection exhibited in the character of Jesus. The observations which follow are more obvious and familiar.

Our Lord, in the second place, "*shewed the Father*" of mankind in his Moral Government. It is of the utmost importance for us to know, that the world is governed on the principles of justice, and that the great Being by whom it is conducted, will finally render unto every man according to his works. The disorders which at present prevail, are not, indeed, sufficient to prevent a sound mind from drawing this conclusion from the natural suggestions of conscience, and from the general appearance of the divine administration; yet doubts upon this subject may very naturally intervene; and it is worthy of the Father of men to give his children more positive assurances that

such is the rule of his government. I need not occupy your time with proving that this is most amply done in the religion of Christ.

In the last place, our Saviour "*shewed the Father*" in his Mercy. The mercy of God, we may suppose from nature, will be vouchsafed to all men who turn from the evil of their ways; but this, too, is doubtful; and the trembling conscience of the repentant sinner requires to be assured. Need I point out how admirably this is effected in the religion of the Master whom we serve; how eager he expresses himself, on all occasions, to call in the wandering into his fold; how ready the Father is, he assures us, to forgive and to receive on the first symptoms of penitence! The whole system of Christianity, indeed, is founded upon this single idea. Repentance, and its happy effects, was the first doctrine which our Saviour

taught, and the last doctrine, the efficacy of which he sealed with his blood upon the cross.

Much more, I am sensible, might be added to these important discussions; but I must now leave the whole subject to your own meditations. The imperfect observations which I have made are, however, I trust, sufficient to point out some circumstances in Christianity which ought to render it a subject of much more attention than it is usual with many to bestow upon it. In the course of these observations, I have confined myself entirely to general views, nor have I been anxious to hold out any one system of Christian belief as preferable to every other. It would, I believe, be conducive to the interests of their common faith, if, touching lightly upon points of doubtful disputation, Christians of every denomination would fix their eyes with more

undivided attention on the great leading fact which runs through all their creeds, —that He in whose name they are baptized, is the pillar of fire given them to direct their course through the night and the wilderness of mortality; "*the sun of righteousness, who has risen with healing in his wings*" upon the darkness of their nature,—in one word, "*the Christ, the Son of the living God, whose,*" and whose only, "*are the words of eternal life.*"

In a former discourse, I took occasion to express my regret that the voice of nature should ever utter language which is not heard, or that any men, especially those whose reputation for science has bestowed upon them a character of authority, should fall under the possible suspicion that, in examining the works of the Divine hand, they can be blind to the discovery of Him by whom these works

are formed. I now express a similar regret, that any of those whose names are distinguished for letters or genius, should ever have written or spoken disparagingly of revelation; and it is with a feeling of horror that I look to the fatal effects their wild and unthinking infidelity has produced in the world. How often, alas! have they offended, not one, but many of these little ones; and how often in our day, as in the hour of crucifixion, must he whom they denied have addressed his Father in the memorable words, "*Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" All I can add, my brethren, is to warn the young, that while they read the writings of these eminent men, they should be on their guard against the poison contained in them: calling to their recollection, that "*wide is the gate, and broad is the way*

*which leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; but strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which* return-eth *unto life, and few there be that find it.*"

# SERMON VII.

## THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST.

MATTHEW, ii. 11.

"*And when they were entered into the house, they saw the young child, with Mary his mother.*"

AT this season *, my brethren, our attention is naturally turned to the consideration of those circumstances which the Evangelists have related respecting our Lord's nativity. They are few in number; but it is impossible to imagine any

* Christmas.

more beautiful and interesting. How much solemnity in the salutation of the holy virgin by the "*angel, who came unto her and said, Hail! thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. When she saw him* (continues the Evangelist,) *she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God. And behold thou shalt conceive and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*"

The vision of angels which appeared to the shepherds at the time of our Lord's birth, is another circumstance of inimitable beauty. "*There were in the same*

*country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo! the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring unto you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."*

My text is taken from the account of another incident, not less striking than any of those already mentioned, and which marks, perhaps, in still stronger colours, the universal importance of that event which was then transacting in the world: the account I mean of the journey undertaken by the wise men from

the East, in search of that prince whose approaching birth they had been taught to expect, and guided by the star, which led them on rejoicing, till it brought them to the place where he was found.

The beauty and solemnity of these miraculous occurrences are greatly enhanced by the plain and homely character of the natural appearances with which they are contrasted, and with which, at the same time, they so harmoniously combine. The mighty event which called down an angel of God to visit the virgin solitude of the daughter of David; which brought the host of heaven to speak peace and joy to the simple innocence of shepherds; which interrupted the calm speculations of the eastern sages, and impelled them to follow a miraculous sign into a foreign land; seemed, to all outward appearance, to be nothing more than the birth of a child in some of

the lowest circumstances of human fortune. "*When they were come into the house* (says the Evangelist, speaking of the wise men), *they saw the young child, with Mary his mother.*"

It is possible, that this simple and unimposing form in which our Saviour is first presented to us, may operate with some minds to the prejudice of his religion: I shall, therefore, endeavour, in a very few words, to shew that, on the contrary, it affords a strong confirmation of its truth; that it corresponds exactly with the wants and wishes of the human heart; and, finally, that there is a striking coincidence between this first appearance of our Lord, and the whole genius and spirit of Christianity.

In the first place, then, could any messenger from heaven come before us in circumstances more completely inconsistent with the supposition of ar-

tifice or imposture? "*When they were come into the house, they beheld the young child, with Mary his mother.*" What is there here to excite our most jealous apprehensions, or to afford a ground of suspicion to the most vigilant distrust? Is it possible that, in this simple domestic scene, the seeds of deception should be striking root? Was the mother mingling with her caresses the proud thought that her son was destined to lead after him a deluded world? or was the infant, while he answered to her smiles, dreaming of the enterprise which lay before him? When we behold a dark-minded prophet issuing from the depth of solitudes and deserts, infusing a lofty enthusiasm into the minds of a barbarous people, and leading them on to conquest and devastation, we, who are beyond the sphere of the delusion, can at once affirm, notwithstanding the splen-

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dour of his success, that he owed it to hypocrisy and deception. How different the scene here presented to us! It is humble, and makes no pretensions; but it finds its way into our souls by the same passages by which truth is conveyed to them. When we are in the presence of "*the young child, and Mary his mother,*" do not our hearts inform us, that the God of truth is not far from us?

In the second place, I affirm, that the very humility of this scene is the circumstance to which the human heart must be most attached, however it may disappoint some wandering irregularities of the imagination. When the children of Israel were terrified with those awful manifestations of the divine majesty which accompanied the promulgation of their law, their words were, "*Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not.*"

This my brethren, is the language of human nature, Encircled by the frailty of the flesh, man is afraid to hold any direct intercourse with the Almighty. It was then that, condescending to the infirmity of his creatures, God said to Moses, "*I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth.*" What the heart desires in a divine instructor is, that while he has the words of God in his mouth, he should yet be raised from among his brethren of mankind. I need not inform you how remarkably this wish of the human heart is accomplished in the whole dispensation of Christianity, or how admirably the character and condition of our Saviour at all times correspond with the description of a prophet who, possessing the words of the living God, was yet subject to all the feelings and affections of a man, and

was often severely "*touched with a sense of our infirmities.*" I am only at present led to remark to you in what a pleasing manner this circumstance is corroborated by the little simple incident now before us, and the short glimpse afforded us of the infant years of Jesus, while he was yet an inmate in the house of his parents, and before he felt himself called upon to execute the mighty designs for which he was sent into the world. How beautifully is the awful character of a supernatural instructor softened down by these means to our hearts and affections! Can we be afraid of approaching a child? Is there any thing in the house of Mary which can excite our apprehension and alarm?

My third remark was, that there is a very striking coincidence between this first appearance of our Lord, and the whole genius and spirit of Christianity.

It is a remarkable characteristic of our religion, that while it is doing every thing for the good of mankind which can be done, it yet seems to be doing nothing. It resides in the hearts of the faithful, and silently influences the conduct of their lives. It flows in a quiet stream through nations and communities of men, and, by an unobserved principle of improvement, refines and beautifies their manners and institutions. It is secretly, and by slow degrees, bringing in that "*better kingdom, wherein dwelleth eternal righteousness;*" and yet, to the eyes of the world, every thing seems to be proceeding as it had done from the beginning. With this gentle and unobtrusive form, in which Christianity at all times appears to us, the history of its introduction corresponds. The miracles which then accompanied its progress were exhibited to those only who could

feel their value. No vain display of prodigies interrupted the course of nature and the business of human life; no portents of terror shook the world at the descent of its Creator. When the Eastern sages came with splendid offerings, in expectation of finding some royal babe, they were introduced to the lowly dwelling and the humble groupe of the text, "*the young child, with Mary his mother.*"

Farther, my brethren, Christianity is the religion of love and mercy; and therefore its Author is first presented to us in the most amiable of all human forms. It is the religion of a pure and simple heart;—and its Author first appears to us in the very shape and image of simplicity and innocence. "*Suffer little children to come unto me* (says he), *for of such is the kingdom of heaven:*"—and he himself accordingly first comes to us as a little child. When the law was given

to the Jews, it was proclaimed with circumstances of terror corresponding to the nature of the institution. The voice of God was heard from Mount Sinai, speaking from the thunders and lightnings. The gospel of peace springs up to us from the cradle of an infant!—I forbear to pursue these reflections farther. Your own meditations will supply their deficiencies. Permit me rather, before I conclude, to suggest to your thoughts a few observations of a more practical tendency.

You are now, then, advancing to the contemplation of a scene altogether heavenly, and glorious, and joyful: no other than the union of heaven and earth,—the descent of the First-born from the bosom of his everlasting Father into the mortal arms of maternal love. You are advancing to behold whatever is pure, and simple, and wise among men, bend-

ing around the cradle of the infant Saviour; to behold the heavens opening, and a multitude of the heavenly host descending, and to hear that hymn of praise which has for ever encircled the eternal throne, now uniting to the strain of "*Glory to God in the highest,*" the welcome sounds of "*peace on earth, and good will towards men.*" Such are the scenes of moral and celestial beauty which the Church is now disclosing to you; and such the real magnificence, unpolluted by the vain additions of worldly splendour, with which, when she throws open her "*everlasting doors,*" you behold "*the King of Glory enter in.*"

Other scenes are indeed behind. You must yet follow your Sovereign through his triumphant sufferings, and view him when he is crowned only with thorns, and elevated in agony on the cross. These scenes you are about to anticipate at the

altar, and I pray to God that their influence may be felt on every heart. The cross, my brethren, will there remind you, that you have afflictions to endure, and sins to be repented of; but it will recal these recollections to your minds, accompanied with the powerful consolation, that one has gone before you who will strengthen you in all your sufferings, and who has obtained for you the remission of your sins. Persevere, therefore, in your Christian profession: let not the cross of Christ be to you a "*stumbling-block*" or *foolishness*." When that scene of humiliation is over, you will again behold the glories of heaven unveiled, and him who bowed his head and gave up the ghost for your sakes, again rising triumphant from the darkness of the grave; and you will hear his divine voice calling upon you to follow him, without terror or distrust, through "*the valley of the shadow of*

*death.*" Follow him then in life and in death; and when all these present things shall have passed away, and when time shall be no more, you will yet reign with him through the ages of eternity.

But it is not the Church only which at this time invites us to participate in its joys. The world, too, has joys of its own; and they, I fear, commonly gain the precedence in our minds. Yet, at this auspicious season, there is one very beautiful link by which the Church and the world are connected. You have it in my text. "*When they were come into the house, they beheld the young child, with Mary his mother.*" Go, then, and enjoy the society of families and friends, the meeting of mothers and their children. Yet go in the spirit of religion, not with the thoughtless ingratitude of man. Go as the children of God, and acknowledge amidst your enjoyments

the hand from which they flow; and when you look upon the countenances of those whom you love upon earth, breathe the secret prayer that you may yet meet and love them in heaven.

One farther observation and I have done. The season which brings joy and gladness to us, brings suffering to many of our brethren. The poor, alas! will too certainly be subjected to inclemency and hardship, while we are giving way to mirth and gaiety. Yet you know, that he whose birth you now commemorate, although born a king, came not with the distinctions of rank and fortune: they who went to seek for him found him not surrounded with the splendours of royalty: they entered into a cottage, and found only a solitary woman and her child. Go, then, my brethren, but go not to the house of feasting alone; enter likewise the dwellings of the poor,

and seek there for "*the young child, and Mary his mother.*" Bring forth there your gifts, and remember to your comfort, that, inasmuch "*as ye do good to one of the least of these his brethren, ye have done it unto him.*"

# SERMON VIII.

## ON MAN AS A RATIONAL AND MORAL BEING.

JOB, xxxii. 8.

"*But there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.*"

WHILE it is the object of some philosophical systems to degrade man nearly to a level with the brutes, the sacred writings always represent him as "*little lower than the angels.*" They affirm, indeed, that he has lost the original purity of his nature; that he is corrupt and fallen; but

this melancholy truth they never enforce with malignant triumph, nor make it the subject of indecent raillery. On the contrary, while they inform him plainly of the misfortune attending his condition, and of the incalculable evils of which it may be the cause, they console him with the account of those great exertions which divine mercy has made in his behalf, and endeavour to make him keep pace with those exertions, by elevating his mind to a sense of what he was, and by bringing before him all those traces of grandeur and excellence in his nature which still, however faintly, shadow out the image of God. "*When I consider* (says David) *the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crown-*

*ed him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.*"

In discoursing from the text, I propose, first, to assert the inherent excellence of our nature; and, secondly, to draw practical inferences from the doctrine.

Under the first head I shall consider man in three views,—as a Rational, a Moral, and a Religious being.

"*There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding.*" How are we otherwise to account for that superiority which man has acquired over all the other inhabitants of this world? Inferior in strength to many, passing a long period of weakness and infancy, how has this being been enabled to protect himself from the ferocity of the lion and the tiger; and why are these animals fugitives in the woods, while he

is the Lord of the earth? What reason can we give but this, that while the animals follow merely the impulses of appetite, and walk in the unvarying road of blind instinct, the mind of man rushes into futurity, and forms innumerable devices for accomplishing its deliberate designs; that, long before the occasion comes, it has foreseen the plan of conduct, and has supplied, by artificial assistances, the defects of natural strength. Thus, in the lowest conditions of human society, there is always a marked pre-eminence in man over the other animals: in him there are at all times, however they may occasionally be clouded and obscured, indications of invention and design; of a mind possessing in some degree a creative energy, and so far resembling that supreme Intelligence which devised the immense assemblage of ex-

istences that compose this prodigious universe.

The effects of this power in man are by no means small and insignificant. Even in the savage state he builds his hut; he subdues the beasts of the forest, and assembles about him many simple conveniencies. While he is yet remote from what we call civilization, the native grandeur of the human mind shews itself in bold exertions of genius; and as he proceeds in his career, man constantly discovers new resources. Into whatever situation he is brought, he brings along with him a mind equal to it; and the same creature that, on his first appearance, seemed but ill qualified to contend with the other animals for a precarious subsistence in the woods, is afterwards seen to sit in the palaces of kings; to guide his adventurous prow across the ocean; to make the earth render him the yearly

return of his labour; to form enlightened plans of policy; to regulate the deliberations of senates; to count the number of the stars; and to reflect on the workings of his own mind.

Now, what is this power, the effects of which are at all times so much superior to the operations of other animated beings, and which, in the course of ages, seems to separate man from the brutes almost as far as from the trees or from the rocks? Is it a principle not differing in kind from their regular and constant instinct, although at last it produces these effects by some strange concurrence of accidents? Or is it not rather, what the text declares it to be, "*a spirit in man, the inspiration of the Almighty?*"

Going on the principles of natural reason,—what, indeed, is it that produces in our minds a belief of the existence of the supreme God, but the perception that

the world which we inhabit bears strong indications of design and intelligence having been employed in its formation? It is because we perceive, in this beautiful world, some resemblance to the works of our own hands, that we conclude it to be the contrivance of a Being in some respects like to ourselves. Our connection with God is impressed on our minds by the very proofs which bring us a knowledge of his existence; and we could not know that there was such a Being, unless we tried his works by the scale of our own reason.

Examine, on the contrary, what our feelings are when we look to the operations of the lower animals. In their instincts we perceive, no doubt, much curious contrivance; but it occurs to us at once, that the contrivance is not their own; that it proceeds without design on their part; and that, in fact, they are but

a sort of machines in the hands of a superior power. We immediately, therefore, perceive that there is a part of our nature in which we bear no relation to them; and in following out the proofs of the existence of God, we see that there is a part in his nature in which he must be related to us. That part is reason and intelligence. To this principle we necessarily ascribe all the artifice and contrivance discernible in the order of the universe; and we are conscious that this is a principle which we ourselves exert in our most important actions. Thus, from the consideration of his rational powers, man discovers one of the ties which bind him to the Father of nature; one of the analogies which he bears to the most exalted of all Beings; one strong lineament of that divine image after which he was originally formed.

The same great truth will appear in a still more striking light, if we proceed to consider man, farther, as a Moral being.

While the other animals follow blindly the impulse of appetite, without discerning the tendency of their actions, there is impressed on the mind of man a rule by which he judges himself,—a sense of right and wrong in conduct, by which he becomes conscious that he is the object either of love and esteem, or of contempt and hatred. While he attends to this monitor within, he is strongly incited to take the good and honourable part, and to spurn at every thing which is unjust, despicable, and shameful. Whenever this ruling principle of his actions obtains a due force in his mind, man at times displays the most estimable qualities, and is evidently a being to be in a high degree respected and loved. Whatever may be the real case of the world in ge-

neral, yet the many examples with which history, or our own observation may supply us, of men truly and greatly virtuous, shew clearly what human nature is capable of; what admirable fruits it may bear; how many traces, in its moral capacity, it may exhibit of the workmanship of the divine hand. And these traces are not confined to any particular ages and countries; but at all times, and in every region, under all forms of religion and government, in savage and in civilized society, the native goodness of the human heart has had many opportunities of displaying itself.

Now, my brethren, let us reflect on the very high dignity and importance of this part of our constitution; how much it elevates us above the other creatures; how close a connection it forms between us and the Almighty! Do not our natural feelings assure us, that those quali-

ties which are the objects of esteem, of love, of reverence, are by far the highest and most dignified qualities which any being can possess, and that, without these, all other qualifications are absolutely trivial and insignificant? The moral attributes, therefore, are in fact those alone which command our real veneration in the divine nature itself; for whatever might be the intelligence or the power of the Deity, unless he were also good, we might, indeed, regard him with fear or wonder, but it is evident we could not reverence or adore him. Reason and intelligence, accordingly, however lofty and sublime a thing it may be, is yet truly admirable and valuable, only when it acts in subservience to moral goodness; and a being who is capable of moral goodness, who has a sense of right and wrong impressed on his mind, evi-

dently possesses, or at least is able to acquire, the highest and most excellent of all possible qualifications.

What, then, can this part of our nature be, other than "*a spirit in man, the inspiration of the Almighty;*" How are we here exalted above all the other creatures around us, and what kind of philosophy is that which would pretend to account for our moral feelings from any thing which we possess in common with them? How can we derive, except from God himself, except from the spirit which he has breathed into man, any feeling of those excellencies, any love for, or any aspiration after that goodness which indisputably constitutes his own greatest attribute? Is not our relationship to the divine nature apparent in this, that we alone, of all the creatures breathing upon the earth, are capable of having any relish of those perfections which alone ren-

der God himself the object of worship and love?

I should now proceed to consider man as a Religious being; but this branch of the subject, and the practical inferences to be drawn from the whole doctrine, I must defer till a future occasion. I shall only remark farther at present, that inquiries such as those in which we have been engaged, are by no means inconsistent with the business of this place; nor are the reflections in which we have indulged in any respect contrary to the peculiar doctrines of the Christian faith. Although it is the great object of our religion to represent man as fallen, and as requiring his nature to be renewed, yet this supposes human nature to be originally good, and worthy of the divine care and protection. It supposes the vitiation not to be incurable: and therefore it is highly reasonable, and of im-

portant service to religion, to consider what our nature is in itself, independently of the accidental corruption into which it is fallen. It is surely delightful to turn our eyes from the actual vice and folly prevalent in the world, and to discover in the mind of man those fountains of wisdom and goodness which were originally placed there by his Maker, and which still remain, however the waters which have flowed from them may have been stained and poisoned. As St Paul, speaking with triumphant exultation of his apostolic mission says, "*I magnify my office*," so, I believe, it is the part of a good man to magnify his nature; and the higher estimation he forms of that, the more will he regret all those failures in his own conduct, which bring disgrace on a work at first so admirably framed.

# SERMON IX.

## ON MAN AS A RELIGIOUS BEING.

JOB, xxxii. 8.

"*But there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.*"

IN discoursing on a former occasion from these words, I called your attention to two striking views of human nature, and contemplated the dignity of man as a Rational and Moral being. As possessed of reason, he claims a decided superiority over all the other inhabitants of this globe,

and carries about with him a principle which bears an affinity to that supreme Intelligence from which the universe itself proceeded. As endowed with moral perception and sentiment, he is capable of acquiring qualities the most estimable and amiable; and exhibits traces of that Goodness, which, in its perfect form, we ascribe to God as his most glorious attribute. In each of these aspects, therefore, we discover the connection between man and his Creator, and are prepared to say with Moses, that "*God made man after his own image*"

There is still another feature of our nature, my brethren, in which this lofty relationship is still more strongly expressed. The connexion not only exists; but it is felt: man has not only received understanding from the inspiration of the Almighty; but he knows that it is so; and he is prompted by nature to lift up his

thoughts to the contemplation of that great Being who conferred upon him so high a pre-eminence. It is here that we find in the mind of man something inexpressibly sublime, something that elevates him far above all that is little and perishing upon earth, and connects him by the ties of the heart with the eternal Ruler of the heavens.

This principle it is which distinguishes us from the lower animals, even more than our reason or our moral perceptions. In their operations, something like reason may perhaps at times be found; and if not moral feeling, yet kind affection; but religion is the grand prerogative of man. He alone, of all the creatures which inhabit the earth, lifts his eye to heaven; and while he deigns not to hold any intercourse with the beasts of the field, he yet thinks it not presumption to address himself to the unknown God. Whoever

man exists, there, too, you will find religion. You will find states of society in the lowest and most abject condition, as far as mental improvement, or the comforts of life are concerned; but where will you not find the worshipper and the temple?

In vain have some sceptical reasoners endeavoured to throw a cloud over this beautiful fact, by collecting into one view, all the follies of superstition; and thus attempting to shew that the religion of man is rather a proof of the weakness than of the loftiness of his nature. The extravagancies of superstition are indeed a perplexing scene; and it must be owned, that the vices and follies of man have shewn themselves as frequently in the midst of his religious sentiments as in any other part of his character. Yet the perversions of religion ought never to be treated in a light and careless strain; they are rather objects of pity: or, if any

thing like scorn should be applied to them, it ought to be mingled with that deep indignation and regret, with which the strong colouring of the prophet Isaiah exposes the idolatry of the nations.

"*They that make a graven image* (says he) *are all of them vanity, and their delectable things shall not profit, and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know, that they may be ashamed. Who hath formed a God, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? Behold all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up: yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together. The smith with the tongs, both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms; yea he is hungry, and his strength faileth; he drinketh no water, and is faint. The carpenter stretcheth out his rule, he*

*marketh it out with a line, he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with a compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house. He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest; he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. Then shall it be for a man to burn; for he will take thereof and warm himself; yea he kindleth it and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god and worshippeth it, he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast and is satisfied; yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire. And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, deliver me, for thou art my god. They*

*have not known nor understood, for he hath shut their eyes that they cannot see, and their hearts that they cannot understand. And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burnt part of it in the fire; yea, also, I have baked bread upon the coals thereof: I have roasted flesh and eaten it, and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? He feedeth of ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, is there not a lie in my right hand?"* Is. Chap. xliv.

No doubt, my brethren, however degrading it may be, this is but too true a picture; and man, unenlightened by revelation, instead of discovering "*the invisible things of God, which, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,*" man has at all times "*changed the glory of the*

*uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible men, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.*" Yet, whatever may be the cause of this error,—whether his ignorance may partly excuse it, or the corruption of his nature may necessarily infuse into all its conceptions of the Deity something that is debasing, and trivial, and low ;—however we are to account for such superstitious delusions, still it is plain that man must find a God ; and if a "*deceived heart hath turned him aside that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, is there not a lie in my right hand?*" he will yet rather fall down to the stock of a tree, than want an opportunity of giving scope to the religious sentiments of his nature.

In fact, therefore, the histories of human superstition, although they contain many indications of the inability of man to work out for himself any regular and

consistent scheme of religion, without assistance from above, yet prove more strongly than even the best constructed systems of natural religion, that he is by nature a Religious Being; that, in the lowest and most degraded condition of savage life, he yet hears a voice which calls him to worship and adore: and where is the wonder if, in the perplexity of his thoughts, he should rather believe that the object of his devotion was to be found in the wind, in the earthquake, or in the fire, than in the "*still small voice*" which speaks from the majestic harmony of nature? Were religion only to be found as it is discovered by reason, there might be some pretext for saying that it is a beautiful invention of philosophers; but when we discover it in every shape; operating in some measure wherever human beings exist; twisted, so to speak, with the cords of their hearts; what can

we conclude, but that it was originally interwoven with these by him who formed them?

Here, then, likewise, we perceive "*the spirit in man, the inspiration of the Almighty:*" a spirit, indeed, clouded and obscured, struggling with darkness, and fettered by sin, yet aiming at lofty things, and striving to regain some glimpses of that divine form, which was accustomed to walk with man while yet in the garden of primæval innocence *.

* These observations were suggested to me by the following profound and eloquent passage in Mr Stewart's "Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind." After making some quotations from Mr Hume's Natural History of Religion, this enlightened philosopher proceeds as follows:—"What is the inference to which we are led by these observations? Is it (to use the words of this ingenious writer) that the whole is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery, and that doubt, uncertainty, and suspense, appear the only result of our most accurate scrutiny concerning this subject? Or should not

Upon this subject I will only remark farther, that, as a Religious being, man assumes a character of importance to

rather the melancholy histories which he has exhibited of the follies and caprices of superstition, direct our attention to those sacred and indelible characters on the human mind, which all these perversions of reason are unable to obliterate; like that image of himself, which Phidias wished to perpetuate, by stamping it so deeply on the buckler of his Minerva, "ut nemo delere possit aut divellere qui totam statuam non imminueret." In truth, the more striking the contradictions, and the more ludicrous the ceremonies to which the pride of human reason has thus been reconciled, the stronger is our evidence that religion has a foundation in the nature of man. When the greatest of modern philosphers * declares, that "he would rather believe all the fables in the Legend, and the Talmud, and the Alcoran, than that this universal frame is without mind;" he has expressed the same feeling which in all ages and nations has led good men, unaccustomed to reasoning, to an implicit faith in the creed of their infancy; a feeling which affords an evidence of the existence of the Deity, in-

* Lord Bacon, in his Essays.

which no bounds can be placed. When his thoughts rise to the contemplation of God, he is likewise led to anticipate that

comparably more striking than if, unmixed with error, and undebased with superstition, this most important of all principles had commanded the universal assent of mankind. Where are the other truths, in the whole circle of the sciences, which are so essential to human happiness, as to procure an easy access, not only for themselves, but for whatever opinions may happen to be blended with them? Where are the truths so venerable and commanding, as to impart their own sublimity to every trifling memorial which recals them to our remembrance; to bestow solemnity and elevation on every mode of expression by which they are conveyed; and which, in whatever scene they have habitually occupied the thoughts, consecrate every object which it presents to our senses, and the very ground we have been accustomed to tread? To attempt to weaken the authority of such impressions, by a detail of the endless variety of forms, which they derive from casual associations, is surely an employment unsuitable to the dignity of philosophy. To the vulgar it may be amusing in this, as in other instances, to indulge their wonder at what is new or uncommon; but to the philosopher it belongs to perceive, under all these various dis-

continuance of existence in himself which he necessarily ascribes to the Deity. Reason might be doomed to perish; virtue itself might be lost for ever in the dust; but faith looks beyond mortality, and beholds scenes of grandeur and glory opening before its eye, which have no termination, and are darkened by no cloud. I am sensible, my brethren, that I cannot do justice to this lofty feature in man, this part of his nature which indeed "*covers him with glory and honour.*" I leave it, therefore, to your own meditations, and shall close the whole subject of discourse with some reflections of a practical tendency.

guises, the workings of the same common nature; and in the superstitious of Egypt, no less than in the lofty visions of Plato, to recognise the existence of those moral ties which unite the heart of man to the Author of his being."—*Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind.* Second Ed. p. 368-370.

First, then, I address myself to the young, to those who, in this seat of liberal education, have perhaps been lately engaged with inquiries and studies which have enlarged the capacity of their minds, and opened an unlimited range to the natural freedom of their thoughts. To their ardent eyes have been unveiled the secret laws of an orderly universe; and they have beheld, with equal admiration, the magnificent fabric of the human mind. From such studies, conducted as they hitherto have been, they must have arisen with no mean impressions of the dignity of that intellectual nature which could thus be employed: and their own experience must have told them, that there are speculations which the human understanding can reach, and which yet seemed adapted to a being but "*a little lower than the angels.*" Let them, therefore, retain these exalted feelings, and

conduct all their future inquiries with a becoming reverence for the nature to which they belong. The advice is not unseasonable; for I believe it will be discovered, that all those monstrous perversions of opinion, with which the present times abound, may be traced to the vanity of individuals, who, forgetting their real dignity as men, have sought for a despicable celebrity, by starting out from their species, and affecting some sort of private and incommunicable perfection of intelligence. From this source, especially, has flowed that torrent of declamation and folly which has been poured out on the subject of religious belief, a subject with respect to which it is certainly the duty of those who have opportunity to "*prove all things*;" but it is still more their duty, to "*hold fast that which is good.*" In such inquiries, the young naturally attach themselves to those in whose wis-

dom they can confide; and it has unfortunately happened, that the champions of infidelity in our age have had something specious and liberal in their manner:

> But all is false and hollow, tho' their tongues
> Drop manna, and can make the worse appear
> The better reason—for their thoughts are low.

In the second place, the contemplation of the high rank which man holds in the scale of beings, ought to make us all more deeply sensible of the value and importance of Christianity, which has brought immortality to light, and has made all the future prospects of the human race correspond with whatever is great in their present condition.

There is a voice in every breast which assures us, that we are formed after no mean model; that man does not occupy a common place in the theatre of nature; and that there is a spirit in him superior to that of the beasts which perish. Corres-

ponding to this natural impression, the revelation of Christ informs us of lofty things. It tells us, that the only Son of God took upon him the nature, not of angels, but of man; and that, after having lived and died for the good of his brethren of mankind, he threw open to them the gates of immortality. These, my brethren, are great discoveries; yet they are discoveries which we are prepared by nature to receive. They are discoveries of boundless beneficence in God; yet of a beneficence which man has at all times experienced, and which, in these revelations, has only completed a work which would otherwise have appeared imperfect. Be it our part, therefore, to embrace, with thankful and believing hearts, those glad tidings of salvation; and, fixing our eyes on "*the author and finisher of our faith*," to behold exemplified

in him the real greatness and dignity of man.

Finally, let us remember, that although man is made "*but a little lower than the angels,*" he may yet fall into the lowest degradation; and whether we look around us, or into our own hearts, let us be aware that we shall too often see and feel corruptions which are unworthy of the nature which we have received. One thing, and one alone, can reduce, and has reduced this lofty nature to the basest condition;—not poverty, not disease, not death,—but sin. If, then, we would in any degree secure the honours of our being, there is one exertion in which we ought strenuously to labour,—the exertion of virtue. This is our true occupation, that which of all others is suited to a being whose spirit is the inspiration of the Almighty. "*Whatsoever things, therefore, are true, whatsoever things are honest,*

*whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things—those things which ye have both learned and received, and heard and seen, do, and the God of peace shall be with you.*"

# SERMON X.

## PROOFS OF IMMORTALITY FROM REASON.

II. TIM. i. 10.

"*And hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*"

FROM these words it is not meant to be inferred, that, independently of the gospel, men have no intimations of a future state, but only that these intimations are dark and obscure, and that our Saviour brought this important truth into full light and certainty. On a point of so much consequence, it is useful to collect proofs

from every quarter, from natural reason as well as from revelation; and, indeed, it is only by comparing together those different sources of information, that we can justly appreciate the value of that knowledge with which Christianity has supplied us.

Let us then begin with the light of nature, and see how far it will lead us to the sublime conclusion, that we are immortal beings; that this life is but the passage to another; and that the grave, with all its horrors, is the gate which opens on an eternal world.

Consider, first, the universality of this belief; that, in some shape or other, it is to be found among all nations; that men have always looked beyond the tomb, and have never been able to reconcile themselves to the notion, that death was the eternal termination of their existence. Whence this belief? How should so pro-

digious a supposition have fastened itself so closely to the mind of a being who is only of yesterday, and who to-morrow may be laid in the dust? What is there in this span of life, which could thus lead us to presume on an eternity? From a scene which promises so little, whence should those mighty expectations arise?

In vain will it be said, that man is at all times chimerical; that his imagination is ever stretching beyond the real state of his condition; that he hopes and fears he knows not what; and that no regular conclusions can be drawn from the extravagant opinions into which he runs. Man, no doubt, is subject to many illusions of the fancy, and perhaps seldom sees any truth clearly and as it is; yet it is a maxim of the wise, that no opinion can gain a steady and permanent footing in the human mind, which has not some foundation in reality, with whatever errors it

may happen to be mixed. Accordingly, the universal belief of men is considered to be a good argument in proof of the existence of God, although, no doubt, the most extravagant and foolish notions have in all ages and countries connected themselves with that belief. The truth is, that all opinions which refer to religion point at something so far above the condition of man in this world, that it is impossible to conceive how his attention should ever have been at all turned to such speculations, unless it were from the voice of nature speaking within him. How should a being who begins in weakness and childhood, who passes his best days in toil and anxiety, and who, at last, decays in old age,—how should such a being ever lift his thoughts to the great overruling Intelligence, whose unceasing watchfulness regulates the government of worlds? How should he carry his presumption so

far, as to believe that he shall participate in that eternal existence which he ascribes to God? The human imagination is indeed extravagant; but if this opinion were not founded in nature and truth, it would be such a pitch of extravagance, that it could never have derived the smallest plausibility from the most beautiful colouring of the most fanciful poet. How, then, should there be "*no speech nor language where its voice is not heard?*"

But, secondly, this opinion, that the soul is immortal, does not rest merely on a vague and unaccountable belief; there are many circumstances which strongly confirm it. Man perceives that he has faculties greatly above his condition here. The great ends of human existence in this world might be answered by the operation of those instincts which belong to the brutes. The lower animals live, continue their species, taste of the enjoyments

which life affords, and then sink quietly into the dust from which they were taken. Why should man have the faculty of reason, if this part of his nature is destined to perish? What are the mighty operations in which that faculty is employed here, that could not, in many instances, be performed more surely by the instincts of the lower animals? They all know the methods of acquiring their food, of forming their places of shelter, of defending themselves from their enemies, and every thing besides that is requisite for their well-being. Man knows none of those things from nature; but is gifted with a power by which he acquires that knowledge for himself. Yet he feels that this power is much more important in itself than in its effects, and that none of the uses to which he can now apply it are adequate to its extent and capacity. He feels that he is in possession of a faculty

to whose operations his fancy can set no bounds, which is adapted for every part of the universe equally with this world in which he exists at present, and which he cannot conceive doomed to perish, as long as the universe itself is under the guidance of reason.

But the principal argument which has at all times led men to the belief of a future state, has been founded on the observation of the imperfect distribution of rewards and punishments in this life: of the misfortunes to which the good are subjected, and the frequent prosperity of the wicked. No one who believes in the existence of a supreme Governor of the universe, can entertain a doubt that virtue is agreeable, and that vice is hateful to him; that he loves those who persevere in the ways of righteousness; and that he looks with abhorrence on the workers of iniquity. It is therefore reasonable to expect, that he

will reward the one, and punish the other; that the righteous will be exalted to honour, and that the wicked will be brought low and debased. There are, in the present course of God's providence, many intimations that such is the plan of his proceedings: The good are certainly even now happier than the wicked, and are also, for the most part, more certainly and substantially prosperous; but still there are very great exceptions to this general rule; and one thing is evident, that there is never an exact proportion observed between a man's merits and his fortune. Nothing, indeed, can be clearer, than that the present life can, in no way, be reckoned a state of retribution. A state of trial it is, and frequently the virtue of good men is tried with great severity; but if there is no future state of retribution, the trial would be in vain. This observation naturally suggests the belief, that in this

world we see nothing more than the beginning of the divine government; that the evils permitted to fall on the good are designed to try their faith, and to strengthen their virtuous habits; while the advantages enjoyed by the wicked are merely delusive, and will not at all exempt them from meeting at last with the punishment which is their due.

Suppose the present life to be our all, and certainly the higher exertions of virtue have no adequate motive. It would be sufficient to live with that decency and attention to character which are necessary for our peace and security among men. A man who would give up any pleasure, or worldly good, for the sake of virtue, would be a loser by the exchange. Or, granting that virtue is always in a great measure its own reward, yet why should a good man suffer any thing? Why should not a marked distinction be made between

him and the wicked? Why should the good ever have ground for complaining, with David, "*that they have cleansed their heart in vain, and washed their hands in innocency; for all day long have they been plagued, and chastened every morning?*"—Why should they have occasion to be "*envious at the foolish, when they see the prosperity of the wicked,*" that "*they are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men; therefore, pride compasseth them about as a chain, violence covereth them as a garment?*" And what other explanation can be given to this strange appearance in the administration of God, except that which the Psalmist declares that he found? "*When I thought to know this,* (he says,) *it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God:—then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction! How are they brought into deso*

*lation as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. Nevertheless, I am continually with thee, thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.*"

In confirmation of this argument, the fears of bad men, and the hopes of the good, are circumstances of no inconsiderable weight. In the midst of the greatest wordly prosperity, and while there are no grounds of apprehension from men, why should it so frequently happen that a bad man has no peace of mind? Why should he fear where no fear is? Why should conscience take the alarm, when every thing conspires to lull him into security? A great crime may be committed so secretly, that the perpetrator shall have no sort of reason for apprehending detection. Why, then, may he not live out his life in quietness; and, when death

at last comes to release him from the world, why should he not sink into the bosom of the earth without apprehension or dismay? Why, but because he feels that his guilt has not been hid from every eye; that One has seen it, from whom alone it was of importance that it should be concealed; and that the stroke of death will not terminate his existence, but will send him trembling into the presence of his Judge. This apprehension alone can account for the intolerable agonies which accompany remorse. When a bad man is seized with this apprehension, he then feels, like Cain, that "*his punishment is greater than he can bear.*" Hence it is, that examples have been found of men, who, pursued by the terrors of conscience, have openly declared to the world crimes which would otherwise never have been discovered; and have submitted to punishment in this world, with the

secret hope that their guilt would thus, in some measure, be expiated in the sight of heaven.

The hopes of good men, under the greatest depression of outward misfortunes, point likewise at this great truth. When a good man is forsaken by the world, and is subjected to the miseries of poverty and the loss of friends, he still finds something within which brings him consolation. It is not merely a good conscience, but it is Hope founded on a good conscience. He has an internal assurance, that however melancholy his present condition may be, there yet is something good in store for him. This hope enables him to bear up, and carries him in triumph through the storms of the world. Whence is this hope? is it a delusion, or is it an assurance from one who cannot lie?

Such, my brethren, seem to be the ob-

servations which, in all ages of the world, have led men to conclude, that their existence does not close with the present scene of things. To some these observations may appear quite satisfactory, and that the subject did not require any farther light to be thrown upon it; but to others they may appear to be merely presumptions, and, after all, not very strong. If they do not strike the mind in a peculiar manner, their force may not be perceived. There was, therefore, still room left for a revelation on this important point; and such a revelation has been made through the gospel. The evidence for the truth of our resurrection, founded on the gospel, is extremely simple. It rests on the assurances of our Saviour, confirmed by his own resurrection from the dead. To these points I will beg leave, on a future occasion, to call your attention.

# SERMON XI.

## PROOFS OF IMMORTALITY FROM REVELATION.

II. TIM. i. 10.

"*And hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*"

IN a former discourse, my brethren, I brought into one view some of the most striking observations which have, in every age, led men to conclude that their existence does not terminate with the present scene of mortality. To some, perhaps, such observations might seem to be of

little value, since we are now happily in possession of a much surer ground of confidence upon this point than the unassisted light of nature can supply. Yet it is at least a pleasing meditation to contemplate the mind of man, even in its rudest condition, anticipating in some degree those sublime truths which it was left for the gospel clearly to reveal; and it must be grateful to the Christian to hear the sound of that voice, which has everywhere cried in the wilderness of the world, "*prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*"

It is in this view, as something preparatory to the information afforded us by revelation, that it is chiefly interesting and important to examine the natural evidences of our immortality. There is, however, a prejudice to which such an inquiry may sometimes give rise, which

it shall now be my business to obviate. The inquirer into the proofs of natural religion may perhaps be so well satisfied with the result of his investigation, that he may think it of little importance to search farther, or to examine the pretensions of any particular revelation. As this is a prejudice which not unfrequently leads into a very wide field of error and delusion, I believe it will not be an useless employment to trace the fallacy which lurks under it.

In the first place, then, admitting that the evidences of our immortality from reason are fitted to produce the highest degree of conviction on the minds of those who will candidly weigh them: still the philosopher ought not to judge of men in general from himself, or suppose that a revelation is unnecessary for the instruction of the human race, because it may be so to a few individuals. The natural

sentiments of all men, indeed, point to some state of existence beyond the grave; and you can never banish from the human heart the hopes and the fears of futurity; but except among a few inquirers of deeper reflection than the rest, these sentiments exist only in a rude and untutored form; and men will cling with eagerness to every source of information, true or false, by which they may be rendered more satisfactory and distinct.

Thus we find the religion of the great body of mankind to be always something more than their natural sentiments, and to consist, in all appearance, rather of what they are taught, than of what they feel to be true. It is in this manner we may account for the wonderful progress of superstition among men, and for the readiness with which every story, however monstrous and extravagant, is listened to, that seems to give any insight into the mys-

teries of the unseen world. Nature, indeed, prompts men to look beyond the grave; but she carries most men no farther than the desire, and leaves them to found a faith which they must have, not upon the conclusions of reason, but upon any pretension or imposture which is thrown in their way.

Now, my brethren, is it unreasonable to suppose that the Father of men should take pity upon the mighty multitude of his rational creatures who wander "*as sheep having no shepherd,*" and that he should give them an instructor from himself to lead them right, when of themselves they cannot but go wrong? If it be said, let the wise instruct the ignorant; —alas! have the votaries of human wisdom any pretensions by which they may gain belief; and has it not, in all ages, been found, that the only instruction to which men will listen on the lofty concerns of other worlds, must seem to come

from wisdom superior to that of man? The ancient philosophers and legislators were frequently obliged to pretend that they possessed communication with heaven; for they knew well, that more than a mortal voice was required to enforce the profound truths of immortality.

But, secondly, may we not be permitted to suspect that, upon this head, philosophers sometimes deceive themselves; and that the faith which they place in the doctrine of immortal life, however firmly it may rest on arguments from reason, is yet not a little supported in their minds by principles of which they are not so well aware? The most pious of the heathen philosophers did not shake off entirely their belief in the superstitions of their age, but were led often to think and feel like the least instructed of their countrymen. Among all the follies of the superstitions which sur-

rounded them, they were yet willing to believe that revelations had been given to the human race; and they scarcely ever arrived at so much confidence in the conclusions of their own reason as not to wish at least that some revelation might be given. If there is really any man in modern times, who, without faith in Christianity, still possesses a firm conviction of his immortality, I will venture to affirm, that the faith of that man is supported in no small degree by the existence of Christianity everywhere around him; and if he saw not the multitude going to the house of God, he would have less assurance than he now feels, that there is an eternal house to which all the true worshippers of God will one day go.

What are philosophers? Wise men, certainly, if they are really philosophers; yet they are but *men*, and, like others,

subject to doubt, despondency, and error. Will reason do every thing for them? Does it leave no room for the apprehension of mistake? and, on a point which involves so deep an interest, is it not of importance "to make assurance doubly sure?" In truth, it seems to be the intention of Providence that, upon this great subject of religion, no man shall take it upon him to say that, by the mere force of reason, he shall reach any station much higher than is possessed by the surrounding multitude of his fellow creatures; that he shall ever have any sound pretence to suppose himself above the necessity of divine instruction; or that he shall say with impunity to the Most High, "I seek not from thee any addition to the light of my own mind." This age has exhibited, what no succeeding age will forget, the melancholy consequences which have followed from this

proud independence of understanding, among men too of no common sagacity; and we have beheld the tremendous spectacle, of genius and science beginning with the disbelief of revelation, and not settling in any sound system of natural faith; but gradually obliterating from the human heart every sentiment of piety, and bringing nothing in its stead but the coldness of sceptical indifference, or the monstrous perversion of determined atheism.

In the third place, my brethren, I remark that, upon this subject, men require more information than of the mere fact of their immortality. Of itself immortality is scarcely to be wished, unless it is accompanied with the prospect of happiness; and there are some circumstances in the present condition of man which cloud the prospects of futurity to the eye of nature: The very circum-

stance of death throws a shade upon the scene beyond the grave; and a doubt suggests itself to the mind of unenlightened man, how far the state of being to which he is hastening is a condition to be desired. The vulgar opinion of the state of the soul after death, prevalent in the heathen world, was by no means a pleasing one; and the spirits of the departed, instead of being advanced to a higher sphere of existence, were commonly supposed to look back with regret on the enjoyments which they had left behind in this world. Men of thought and reflection, indeed, might attain a different and a truer conception, and might collect, from contemplating the attributes of God, that, in the untried state of being to which they were advancing, those who performed well their part here, would be elevated to a higher scene. Yet who are good, and what allowances are to be made for

the frailties and imperfections incident to the best men? And must the wicked be consigned to despair? Must they be abandoned by the mercy of God, as well as by the pride of human virtue? Is no prospect to be afforded them of grace and pardon? Shall no assurance be made to the penitent sinner, that he too will be received; and even although he should abandon his sins, must conscience continue to terrify him by the recital of his former iniquities?—These are questions to which unassisted reason can make no accurate reply, none at least sufficient to satisfy the feelings of the heart. The best men require some positive assurances to keep their hopes from sinking amidst the consciousness of their many infirmities; and the returning penitent longs for some promise, some sure pledge of forgiveness.

Such, then, is the dark condition in which we are left by nature on this im-

portant inquiry: Let us now examine what light has been thrown upon it by the gospel.

When we look into the records of our religion, the great object which presents itself to our view is the appearance of a divine instructor, who, without any mysterious concealment, addresses himself to the race of man with the voice of authority, and speaks to them as to the children of God, and the heirs of immortality. We see him, with the most winning condescension, opening these sublime truths to every description of men, preaching his gospel to the poor, and calling upon every human being to listen to this single lofty view of his nature. We hear him calling upon all mankind to abandon their follies and superstitions, their own dreams and reveries on the subject of religion, and to come to him, and he will conduct them right! Do we not at once perceive, my

brethren, that this is the Teacher whom *mankind* must follow; that it is he who must lead the human race; and that, however he may be rejected and despised by some, who esteem themselves wise, yet that none but he can guide and conduct the multitude of men? Do we not farther see, that he has guided many sons and daughters into the way of righteousness; and are there not those in the lowest stations of life, who, from his instructions, have attained nobler and more elevated wisdom than is to be found in all the schools of human philosophy?

While the doctrines of our Saviour are so simple, that they are level to the apprehension of the least instructed of the human race, they are at the same time so sublime, that the most enlightened cannot conceive any thing beyond them. The highest and purest views of human reason his doctrines confirm, and confirm

them without any addition of superstitious delusion. They form a point to which all the reasonings of men on those lofty subjects may fix and adhere, and which may prevent the opinions of the thoughtful and inquisitive from being carried about by "*every wind of doctrine.*"

But the most striking circumstance in the system of Christianity is its condescension to all the fears and all the frailties of our nature; and here it comes with a force and energy which every heart must feel, and which no understanding, that is not blinded, can overlook. To the pious and sincere, whose humility may yet be overpowered with the prospects of future glory, and who fear to lift their mortal vision to the blazing throne of eternity,—the Saviour of mankind speaks with the voice of the kindest encouragement, and assures them that in his "*Father's house there are many*

*mansions; and that he has gone to prepare a place for them.*"—To the sinner, whose conscience is heavy laden, the same blessed person addresses himself in accents of the tenderest compassion, and bids him come to him and he will give him rest. Are these assurances not sufficient? Does the sinner still doubt of forgiveness, and tremble in the presence of his God? Then let him look to "*the Lamb which was slain;*" to the offering which God has provided for himself; to him who promises forgiveness, bleeding to assure him that he is forgiven *!

* There is a remarkable passage in the earlier editions of Dr A. Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments, which I am induced to quote here, both as it is now little known, and as it seems to me to place, in a striking point of view, those feelings of the human heart which naturally prepare it for the reception of one of the most obscure, but one of the most consoling doctrines of Christianity. It is as follows:

Must something more yet be done? Does the chamber of death still look sad, and do our hearts fail us for fear, when

"If we consult our natural sentiments, we are apt to fear, lest, before the holiness of God, vice should appear to be more worthy of punishment than the weakness and imperfection of human virtue can ever seem to be of reward. Man, when about to appear before a being of infinite perfection, can feel but little confidence in his own merit, or in the imperfect propriety of his own conduct. In the presence of his fellow-creatures, he may often justly elevate himself, and may often have reason to think highly of his own character and conduct, compared to the still greater imperfection of theirs. But the case is quite different when about to appear before his infinite Creator. To such a being, he can scarcely imagine that his littleness and weakness should ever seem to be the proper object either of esteem or of reward. But he can easily conceive, how the numberless violations of duty of which he has been guilty should render him the proper object of aversion and punishment; neither can he see any reason why the divine indignation should not be let loose without any restraint, upon so vile an insect, as he is sensible that he himself must appear to be. If he would still hope for happiness, he is conscious that he

we see all men entering in, and none coming out? Does he who came to lift our eyes above mortality sleep, too, in the

cannot demand it from the justice, but that he must entreat it from the mercy of God. Repentance, sorrow, humiliation, contrition at the thought of his past conduct, are, upon this account, the sentiments which become him, and seem to be the only means which he has left for appeasing that wrath which he knows he has justly provoked. He even distrusts the efficacy of all these, and naturally fears lest the wisdom of God should not, like the weakness of man, be prevailed upon to spare the crime, by the most importunate lamentations of the criminal. Some other intercession, some other sacrifice, some other atonement, he imagines, must be made for him, beyond what he himself is capable of making, before the purity of the divine justice can be reconciled to his manifold offences. The doctrines of revelation coincide, in every respect, with those original anticipations of nature; and, as they teach us how little we can depend upon the imperfection of our own virtue, so they shew us, at the same time, that the most powerful intercession has been made, and that the most dreadful atonement has been paid for our manifold transgressions and iniquities."—*Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments*, first edit. Lond. 1759, p. 204-206.

grave; and did we trust in vain, "*that it was he who was to redeem Israel?*" No, Christian, thy hope has not been vain! The grave could not detain the Captain of thy salvation. "*Death has had no dominion over him.*"—"*He has ascended up on high, leading captivity captive;*" and now; in the fulness of faith, thou mayst say, "*O death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory?*"

Such, my brethren, are the stupendous truths which ye have now been contemplating! Such is "*the life and immortality which to you have been brought to light through the gospel!*" Meditate upon these things, in the full assurance of faith; glory in your Christian profession; and when you call to mind the multitudes of your fellow-creatures who still "*sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death,*" acknowledge, with gratitude, how greatly you have been blessed, "*whom the Day-spring from on*

*high hath visited;*" who have been brought into "*the fold;*" and "*who have heard the voice of the shepherd:*" and "*seeing that all these present things shall be dissolved, consider what manner of persons ye ought to be, in all holy conversation and godliness;*" who have received the promise of "*new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*"—"*Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye be found of God in peace, without spot, and blameless.*"

# SERMON XII.

ON THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.

EZEKIEL, XXXVII. 3.

"*And he said unto me, Son of man can these bones live! And I answered, O Lord God thou knowest.*"

I KNOW not whether, in the whole volume of Scripture, there is a passage of more astonishing sublimity, than that of which these words form a part.

"*The hand of the Lord* (says the prophet) *was upon me, and carried me out in the*

*spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about; and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo! they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones, Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live; and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live, and ye shall know that I am the Lord. So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them.*

*Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, Son of man, and say to the wind, thus saith the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.*"

It is no long time, my brethren, since we were called upon to contemplate that life and immortality which our Lord brought to light through the gospel, when he rose in triumph from the grave, and became "*the first fruits of them who sleep.*" We shall soon be called upon to contemplate his ascension into heaven, where he now sits at the right-hand of his Father, and makes intercession for his faithful people. These are lofty truths, with which, from our earliest years, we have been familiar; but, perhaps, from that very circumstance, they frequently fail to

impress our minds with the deep feeling which naturally belongs to them. We "*have heard of them by the hearing of the ear;*" we believe them to be true; but while our understandings may be convinced of their truth, our hearts may often be unaffected by them. The world, with its scenes of magnificence, activity, and enjoyment, occupies our eyes, and intrudes into most of our meditations; and we can scarcely be prevailed upon to imagine that there is any thing substantial in those stupendous scenes which lie beyond it. With a view to correct these prejudices, it will not, I believe, be an useless employment to follow the prophet into the dark scene of his meditations; to contemplate with him the cheerless termination of a temporary being; and when all mortal hope is at an end, and when the world is shut out from our thoughts, with him to fix our eye on those prophetic rays

which brighten the gloom, and which visit with "*the Day-spring from on high,*" even "*the valley of the shadow of death.*"

"*The hand of the Lord* (says he) *was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about; and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo! they were very dry.*" The opening of the description presents a picture which we are naturally averse to contemplate: we fly from it into the scenes of dissipation; "*the harp and the viol are in our feasts;*" and we seek to banish, in the transitory enjoyments of our being, the forebodings of its final close. There are times, however, when "*the hand of the Lord is upon us,*" and when the most thoughtless of us are "*carried out in the Spirit of the Lord, and are set down in the midst of the valley which is full of bones.*"

We are called, perhaps, to follow to the grave the parents whom we venerated and loved; the companions of our youth, or the partners of our affections, drop down in the dust before us; even the buds of infancy are nipped, and those new affections, which seemed to carry us forward into a long futurity, are suddenly crushed in the moment of their formation. We then willingly sit down with the prophet "*in the midst of the valley which is full of bones.*" We hear the wind sigh through the grass which covers them; we raise our languid eyes, and fix them on the monuments of mortality; we "*pass by them round about;*" the world, with all its splendour, and toil, and gaiety, vanishes from our sight; and we are drawn, by an irresistible impulse, to contemplate, with undivided attention, the gloomy scene, in which all we have admired or valued here must inevitably terminate; on the "*very*

*many bones in the open valley,*" deprived of every principle of life, and become "*very dry.*"

In these moments of melancholy thought, when all the occupations of men seem insignificant, and for no end; when the labours or the enjoyments which fill up the space of our "*few and evil days*" seem only to deceive us with false hopes, or to give us a taste of happiness which must speedily pass away; when the beauty of creation itself is lost to us, and the sun which shines above our heads seems only to "light us to the tomb;" what, I beseech you, is the only inquiry which we are anxious to make, the only information we are willing to receive? The voice which spoke to the prophet is then heard to speak in every human heart, and to utter the words of incalculable import, "*Son of man, can these bones live?*" The reply to this solemn inquiry will not, in that hour

my brethren, be the careless trifling of the sophist. The lofty mind of man will not then stoop to play tricks with its own ingenuity; but the eye of nature will be raised to heaven, burning through its tears, and the voice of the heart will cry aloud to the Father of existence, and will seek from him the knowledge of the destiny of man. "*O Lord God, thou knowest.*" The gloom of the grave is no darkness to thee; thou breathest into man the breath of life, and thou takest it away; thou alone canst tell whether his being may be renewed!

It is thus we may interpret the reply of the prophet; and it is in this manner that light begins to break in upon the obscurity of "*the valley which is full of bones.*" With what gratitude are the first rays of that celestial light then hailed; and how eagerly does the soul apply for still farther illumination to that living source

whence alone it can flow. How many doubts and misgivings are dispelled, when the God of nature is once fairly recognized; and, when the appeal is made to him, how willingly does he insinuate the prophecy of immortality!

"*Again he said unto me* (continues the prophet), *prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones, behold I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live.*" The same words of prophecy which were at this time heard by Ezekiel, were likewise heard by many wise and good men of the heathen world, who, like him, wandered in the spirit of the Lord through the valley of bones, and from that cheerless scene of desolation, were, like him, prompted to lift the eye of faith to the Father of their being. Whenever the words of faith were uttered, "*O Lord God thou knowest;*" whenever the material veil

was for a moment raised, and a glimpse was caught of the eternal throne of God,—then the rays of prophetic hope dawned upon "*the shadow of death*;" and nature herself, independently of immediate inspiration, could foretel the rise of the immortal form of man from the sleep of the grave. The evidences arising from the attributes of God; from the dignity of the human mind; from the analogies of nature; then crowded in with an increasing force: and even in those dark ages, which "*the Day-spring from on high had not visited*," could assume the high tone and firmness of prophetic assurance. It is thus delightful to find, that in no age of the world did God leave himself without a witness; and that the loftiest truths of religion rose, as if of their own accord, in the minds of the contemplative, from amidst the very horrors which seemed to bury and overwhelm them.

"*And as I prophesied there was a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone.*" I will not, my brethren, trust myself again to repeat the astonishing description which follows; when the visions of prophecy assumed the appearance of present reality; when the prophet at once beheld what before he had only imagined; when the dead were raised up in multitudes around him; and when an "*exceeding great army*" rose from the "*dry bones.*" It is more important for me to say, that what this vision was to him, the Gospel of our Lord is to us: that, to the Christian, the prophetic hopes of nature assume the evidence of reality; that in his hours of meditation in "*the valley which is full of bones,*" the truths of his religion speak from the silence of the grave; that he then seems to hear the Captain of his salvation calling to the four winds, and bidding the earth give up the accumulated dead of ages,

and to behold "*the exceeding great army of the faithful,*" which, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, shall obey the call, and shall follow their leader into those mansions which he has already gone to prepare for them.

The allusion here made to the gospel appears indeed to be obvious and striking. "*As I prophesied,*" says Ezekiel—at the very moment when the eye of man was anxiously turned towards his future being; when the contemplative and the pious were eagerly accumulating the evidences of their immortality, and were rousing up every principle of faith, he who obtained a victory over the grave, made this great truth obvious even to sense: and wherever his followers carried the glad tidings of his resurrection, the Day-spring from on high was immediately shed abroad over many a nation which

had "*sat in darkness, and in the shadow of death.*"

It is thus that I have endeavoured once more to lead your attention to the loftiest and most interesting truth of religion. There are times, we see, when nothing short of this truth can give the slightest interest to the human mind; when the sun loses its light, and all nature is dead and gloomy without it; and when the only consolation the heart can know is contained in the answer to the solemn question, "*Son of man, can these bones live?*" The answer to that question is found by those only who listen to it in the spirit of the Lord; who, in the lowest depth of their affliction, or in their gloomiest meditations on the fate of man, can yet lift the eye of hope and of piety to the Father of nature; and, while their own thoughts are dark, can yet say to him, "*O Lord God, thou*

*knowest.*" From minds thus prepared, all the doubts of nature, or of a vain philosophy, will speedily pass away; the lights of reason will illuminate their path; and the stronger beam of revelation will, even now, seem to disclose the celestial life and immortality which are lurking unperceived for a time under the "*many dry bones*" in the valley of death.

If there are times when this lofty doctrine alone can afford us a gleam of comfort, there is no time in which it ought to pass entirely from our thoughts. There is in fact no time of our mortal existence in which we are not passing through "*the valley which is full of bones.*" We are now treading upon the bones of our fathers; and the feet of our children will soon pass over ours. Is this a world, then, my brethren, which ought to claim all our affections? Is it meet that our "*abiding*

*city*" should be here? and, instead of pursuing without ceasing those advantages which must terminate here, shall we not endeavour to tread in that path of steady goodness which leads so surely into a brighter and an eternal abode?

This path is found without any difficult or perplexed inquiry, by him who will seek for it in the spirit of the Lord, and will here, too, say with the prophet, "*O Lord God, thou knowest.*" Even those who are dead in trespasses and sins, thou, O Lord God, knowest how to restore. To this moral resurrection the prophet at last alludes, and thus closes the profound doctrine which he had unveiled.

"*Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold they say, our bones are dried and our hope is lost; therefore prophesy and say unto them, thus saith the Lord God, Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and will*

*put my spirit in you, and ye shall live. Then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and have performed it, saith the Lord.*"

# SERMON XIII.

## THE TEMPORAL ADVANTAGES OF CHRISTIANITY.

EPHESIANS, iv. 8.

"*Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.*"

THESE words, my brethren, express very beautifully the nature of those blessings which have been conferred on the human race by the Son of God. *When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive;*" he rescued men from the bondage of sin

and death; overcame the rulers of the spiritual darkness of this world; and opened up that new and living way, by which the pure in heart may draw near to God, as children to an indulgent parent.

It is to the concluding words of the text, however, that I wish at prsent to confine your attention. "*He gave gifts unto men.*" The apostle explains immediately to what kind of gifts he refers: "*he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*"

The extraordinary providence of God, in the early progress of the gospel, naturally attracted the peculiar attention of

the apostle. The spirit of God was visibly moving upon the face of the waters, and dividing the light from the darkness. The beauty of the moral world was now breaking forth into view, and the great Parent of all was seen looking upon it also, and beholding it to be very good. The mind of the apostle evidently labours with the mighty scene that was before him; and here, as in many other passages of his writings, he seems incapable of finding words to express the magnitude of his conceptions. It was his lot to behold the infant church striking root, —the grain of mustard-seed thrown into the earth. He saw the hand of him who planted it pouring upon it the dew of heaven; and his prophetic eye looks forward to the time when it should become a great tree, and the birds of the air should lodge in its branches.

It was impossible, therefore, in those times, to avoid perceiving the constant presence of Christ with his church, or to overlook the gifts which he was so liberally dispensing among men. But now the case is different; the religion of Jesus has long been established; the miraculous gifts of the spirit have ceased; the tree has become great, and the birds are now lodging in its branches. The object is in fact greater and more stupendous than it was in the days of the apostle, but we naturally give it less of our attention. The magnificent arrangement of the heavens, and the beauties so liberally scattered over the face of the earth, are proofs of the divine wisdom and goodness, no less now than on the first day of creation, "*when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy;*" but custom has so inured our minds to the splendid spectacle, that we

scarcely contemplate it with admiration. In like manner, having been born and educated under the influence of Christianity, we lose sight of many of the advantages which we have derived from it; and are apt to impute most of the blessings which we enjoy to nature, and to the course of events, which yet, when rightly understood, are to be ascribed to our religion.

To this subject I beg leave at present shortly to direct your attention, both as it is very interesting in itself, and as it will naturally lead me to speak of that charitable institution *, to which we have this day been invited to contribute.

It is very generally acknowledged, that the state of the world is, on the whole, greatly improved since the introduction of the gospel; and whatever may be said of the mischiefs occasioned by superstí-

* The public Dispensary.

tious and perverted views of Christianity, it cannot be denied, that the natural tendency of a religion which declares all men to be the children of one common parent, and which speaks of charity as the end of the commandment, must ever have been to produce "*glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will toward men.*"

These effects have followed from Christianity in no common degree. Even in the times of the darkest superstition, there have been men who caught the true spirit of the gospel, and were "*as cities set upon a hill, that could not be hid.*" How much happiness was disseminated among men in the worst times, by the faith and charity of those individuals who have been true followers of Christ, it is impossible for us to calculate; but we may be assured that, although we meet not in the page of history with any detail of

their humble but glorious efforts, yet the effect produced was not inconsiderable; and that while, in those gloomy periods, we are accustomed to discern nothing but superstition and misery, still the footsteps of the Son of God were to be traced among the dwellings of men, and the light from above was still cheering and animating many an honest heart.

The advantages of the gospel, however, are more apparent in times of civilization and knowledge. We then find Christianity promoting and sanctifying every exertion which is made for the benefit of the human race. We find it giving an impulse to every sound and liberal inquiry, and extending the bounds of the science and the wisdom of man. We find its spirit entering into the counsels of nations, and gradually striving to appease the animosities by which they are divided. We find it unbinding the chains

of the captive, and breathing over the whole world the maxims of impartial justice and of enlightened benevolence.

Are these distinguishing characteristics of the Christian world to be ascribed solely to the progress of civilization and philosophy? Why, then, were they not to be found in the ancient world? Some of the nations of antiquity were greatly advanced in all the arts and improvements by which social life is benefited and adorned; but they were far from possessing the same principles of wisdom, of humanity, and of justice, which are now understood at least, if they are but imperfectly brought into action. We are in the habit of boasting greatly of our advantages in point of civilization and philosophy; but we are not always very willing to acknowledge the source from which these advantages are derived to us. I will not, however, hesitate to affirm, that

unless a steady beam from heaven had opened up to man the path of truth and of wisdom, the world would still have exhibited the melancholy spectacle of the blind leading the blind; and instead of that fair and increasing fabric of knowledge and of improvement which we now behold rearing around us, which is founded upon the rock of ages, and which the winds and the rains of time assail in vain, we should still have beheld the efforts of man wasted on some tower of Babel, beginning in extravagance, and terminating in confusion.

From these extensive views, let us turn to the more familiar consideration of the influence of Christianity on the habits of private life. How beautifully have these been improved by it! How much have the grosser vices been extirpated, or driven into obscurity! There is a sanctity and purity in the private life of good

men, and by a kind of necessity in the domestic life of all men, which was far from prevailing in the world before the introduction of the gospel. Even politeness, and the manners of good society, however artificial they may be, are yet, in a great measure, produced by the influence of Christianity on the public mind. The amusements of men are regulated by the same spirit. There is a decency prevalent, which is expressive of innocence, and which cannot with impunity be greatly violated. Thus luxury has been restrained within bounds; the higher orders of society are prevented from carrying a licence of manners far beyond the limits of propriety; and while they are indulged in those elegancies of life which are suited to their station, they are yet kept in check by the warning voice, that they must "*use these things as not abusing them.*"

If the manners of the affluent have thus been improved, the interests and happiness of the lower orders of society have met, in the progress of the gospel, with a regard and an attention which was quite unexampled in the former history of the world. It is impossible, my brethren, that within my present limits I can do any justice to this most distinguishing feature of Christianity. That it was one great object of our Saviour's mission, appears from his declaration, that he came to "*preach the gospel to the poor*:" it appears from the constant application which he gave, when on earth, to the relief of the infirmities of the lowest of the people: it appears still more from the striking fact, that he was himself a poor man, who had "*not where to lay his head.*" I know not any conceivable circumstance which could have had a more powerful influence in raising and dignifying the condition of

poverty; in making it respectable in the eyes of the proudest and most affluent; in making them zealous to relieve the distresses to which it is liable, than this most astonishing fact, that the same person, before whom the potentates of the earth now bow the knee; whose name in every Christian land is classed with the highest which is named; whose dignity is so lofty, that the imagination of man loses it amidst the splendours of Deity; that he, when he lived among men, should have appeared in the obscurest condition, and with the fewest external advantages. That all these circumstances have had a prodigious effect in removing the worst prejudices which arise from the inequalities of rank in society, appears, in the first place, from the comparative freedom and importance to which the lower orders have attained in every Christian country; and, secondly, from the many institutions which, where-

ever Christianity is disseminated, have been established for removing the wants, and for relieving the diseases of the poor.

It is thus that our Saviour has bestowed present gifts upon men, and that the same divine person who undertook and accomplished their eternal salvation, is, in the present life, their greatest benefactor and friend. This reflection, pursued through all the departments of human life in which Christianity has been beneficial, either by its precepts or its spirit, restores us again, in some measure, to the times of its origin, and makes us still partake in the benefit of our Saviour's presence. When we accustom ourselves to behold his hand spreading abroad happiness among nations, or pointing out to men the paths of peace in private life, we can still fancy that we are enjoying his company, and listening to his sublime instructions. We even are witnesses of his miracles; we see the worst

diseases of body or of mind healed or relieved in those institutions which his Spirit inspired, and over which it presides; and, like the disciples of old, we hear his voice sending us forth to be fellow-workers with him in these labours of love, with him "*to preach the gospel to the poor; to heal the sick; to cleanse the lepers; and freely to give, as freely we have received.*"

On the subject of the institution which at present claims our assistance, my words shall be few. It is most evidently a Christian institution, and breathes the genuine spirit of the gospel. It supplies the poor of our people with aid and advice, under the pressure of disease; restores to their families the labour of fathers and of sons; and smooths the bed of death to the infirm and the aged. "*It suffers likewise the little children to come unto it;*" and by the application of that blessed discovery*, which

* Vaccination.

has in our day been "*a gift unto men*," and which has for ever freed the anxious minds of parents from one of their heaviest alarms, it preserves to the poor man those children to whom he yet looks forward for his future support, and whom he hopes to render a blessing to their country. I need not add one farther word of recommendation. You have here, my brethren, an opportunity of co-operating with your heavenly master in his benevolent designs for the good of mankind. You have lately risen from his altar, where you beheld him "*ascending up on high, and leading captivity captive.*" He now sends you forth to be the ministers of "*his gifts to men.*" Go, then, and rejoice that you are thought worthy to be so employed; and remember with gratitude, "*that inasmuch as ye do good to one of the least of these his brethren,*" he esteems it done "*unto him!*"

# SERMON XIV.

## THE SUPERIOR IMPORTANCE OF MORAL DUTIES.

MATTHEW, ix. 13.

"*But go ye, and learn what that meaneth; I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.*"

THE Pharisees, who were particularly rigid in their outward demeanour, although their hearts were very far from being penetrated with just sentiments of religion, pretended to find fault with our Saviour, for the ease and freedom with which he frequented all kinds of society,

as if, by so doing, he was derogating from that high character which he assumed.—"*Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners?*" was a question which they frequently put to his disciples; and the answer which it received from Jesus was one into the spirit of which they were probably very little capable of entering.—"*They that be whole* (says he) *need not a physician, but they that are sick:*" and then in the words of the text he proceeds; "*but go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice.*—As if he had said; "In consequence of your perverted notions of religion, you cannot at all comprehend the nature of my mission. You suppose that religion consists in a formal attention to rites and ceremonies; I came into the world to shew that it is an active principle, operating upon man as a member of society, and leading to a course of unwearied benefi-

cence: you suppose that the Deity is gratified with the pomp of worship and the sanctity of the countenance; I came to shew that a good heart is what he requires, and that he judges of the heart much more from the conduct of man with man, than from any praises or adoration which can be bestowed on himself."

The error of the Pharisees, which our Saviour here exposes, is one which is very apt to insinuate itself into the minds of those, who, having acquired a speculative belief in matters of faith, have yet neglected to apply their religious principles to the discipline of the heart. Religion, considered merely as a speculation, opens up so wide a field, whether we inquire into the divine attributes, into the immortality of man, or that peculiar dispensation of Providence revealed to us in the gospel; that the mind which is occupied with such investigations, is frequently

liable to be carried away from the business of life, and lost in the unseen world; to quit sight of those ties by which it is connected with the present order of things.—It is thus that religious views occasionally abstract a man from the duties which he owes to his fellow-creatures, and lift him out of that sphere in which Providence designed him to walk.—Fixing his thoughts on things above this world, he is apt to look with contempt, both on the common pains and the common pleasures incident to human nature; he becomes unfeeling and austere; moving in a higher circle, he scarcely regards man as his brother; and his feelings are more shocked with the neglect of any reverential ceremony connected with the objects of his meditation, than with the violation of those moral ties which bind man to man. Here we see the openings by which spiritual pride finds its way

into the mind; the sources of uncharitable opinions and inhuman bigotry; the substitution of frivolous and superstitious observances in the room of real devotion and of active beneficence.

It will not therefore be an useless employment to enforce that view of religion exhibited by our Saviour in the text; for which purpose I shall employ two arguments, the first drawn from the consideration of the divine beneficence, the second from the condition of man in this world.

First, then, contemplate the divine beneficence. If there is any thing certain in religion, it is this; that God is good; that he created the world in love; and that his kind providence and tender mercy are over all his works. Whether we attend to the marks of goodness displayed in the common administration of the world, or take in those more enlarged views with which Christianity presents us, it

will appear, that love to his creatures is the ruling principle of the divine agency.—We cannot indeed, on any other ground, account for the creation of the world, or see a reason why a being, who was complete in himself, should call into existence such an infinite multiplicity of living creatures. The goodness of God is a great motive for every return of gratitude and devotion; for the inward sentiments of a pious heart; and for the outward demonstration of homage and worship. But the assurance of this great truth, that God is altogether beneficent, may convince us, that every thing which promotes the good of his creatures is much more acceptable in his sight than any praise or adoration which can be conferred upon himself. "*I will have mercy and not sacrifice*," is therefore, in all likelihood, the language in which God addresses himself to every order of beings;

to the blessed spirits that enjoy the brightness of his glory, and glow with the constant flame of devotion, as well as to man! "*Are they not all ministering spirits,* (saith the apostle to the Hebrews) *sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*"

But that this is the only language in which *man* can reasonably be addressed, will appear evident, if we go on, in the second place, to consider his condition in this world. It is the doctrine of scripture, (and probably the soundest observations on human nature will confirm the fact) that man is a fallen being; that he is not such as he came from the hands of God; that he has in a great measure lost sight of his divine origin; and therefore, all his attempts to elevate his thoughts to the contemplation of the divine perfections, must be extremely defective and inadequate. The praises which man can

bestow upon his Maker, can never be at all worthy of the great Being to whom they are addressed: they must always be obscured by the imperfect apprehensions, and the erring affections incident to the human mind: the taste of spiritual things is greatly vitiated and destroyed; and probably the sincerest Christian, whose mind is the most illuminated by the Spirit of God, will still find, in his purest and most perfect devotions, a large intermixture of human infirmity and folly.

In this degraded condition of the soul of man, banished as he is from a direct communion with his Creator, and exposed to all the temptations of a deceitful world; exposed to the allurements of sensuality, to the vain distractions of worldly riches, and the innumerable obstructions which lie in his way to those heavenly mansions where yet he hopes to find rest for his soul, what a beautiful and simple path is

still opened for him by the goodness of God! "*I will have mercy and not sacrifice.*" I seek not from man what he cannot perform; I ask not praises worthy my acceptance, which he never can bestow: to feel his distance, "*to walk humbly with his God,*" is the best proof he can give of his devotion; but surely I require of him "*to do justly, and to love mercy.*"—And it is a most beautiful circumstance, that the very condition of human nature which has rendered man incapable of elevating his thoughts to God in a manner at all suitable to the dignity of the object, has opened up to him the widest opportunity for the exercise of all the virtues which have man for their object.

In what scene, so well as in this world, where wickedness and misery prevail, can the virtues of justice and of charity shine with their brightest lustre? In the regions of light, where God is fully known,

the fervour of devotion will glow intensely; we in this abode of sin and darkness can be enlightened only by a few partial rays. But indignation at wrong and oppression; a strong feeling of what is due to man; compassion for the sufferings, and a tender interest in the happiness of our fellow-creatures; can nowhere be learnt so well as in this world, where these virtues are so necessary, and have so many opportunities for exertion. So striking is this fact; so peculiarly adapted is this world to be the school of compassion, and of that character of virtue which we term humanity, that, in a remarkable passage of the epistle to the Hebrews, one of the reasons why the Son of God himself is said to have assumed our nature, and to be tempted in all points like as we are, is, that he might "*be touched with a feeling of our infirmities.*" This then is evidently the course which man ought to

take, to perfect himself, in as far as he can, in those virtuous habits which his situation here has the greatest tendency to produce, without aiming prematurely at the acquisition of endowments, which may be reserved to complete his holiness and happiness in a higher stage of existence.

It will not, I hope, be inferred from any thing which has now been said, that religious exercises, or the duties of prayer and praise, are useless and insignificant. On the contrary, they keep alive in the mind a sense of the divine superintendence, and the sentiment of devotion. All that I wish to establish is this important truth, that, in the present condition of our nature, our duty to God is best performed by the strict and conscientious discharge of our duties to man; by cultivating every right affection, and promoting the good of mankind in every way.

The beauty of the order of Providence consists in this, that the soul of man has a prospect, indeed, but a dark and a distant one, of something higher awaiting it than any thing in this world can supply; of nobler occupations and more elevated enjoyments; of a nearer approximation to the source from which it proceeded, the eternal fountain of all existence. This is the distant view which it becomes us to keep in our eye, which ought to exalt our thoughts, and raise them above every thing mean, despicable, and contrary to religious purity. But when, attaching our thoughts to those views, or to any other pious meditations, we forget our present condition, and our different ties and connections in human society, we are evidently losing sight of the path before us, and which alone can conduct us well to our journey's end. The prospect of a beautiful land for the

termination of our journey, is no doubt delightful, and is a great incitement for keeping us steady in our course; but when, instead of looking at the road on which we must travel, we always keep our eyes on the country whither we are going, we shall be in great danger of mistaking our way.

In a word, it will appear, that every attempt to be religious, which does not rest on the foundation of an humble endeavour to perform our duty in every station in which we are placed, rests on a false principle, and implies an impertinent and vainglorious familiarity with the Deity, which, of all beings, it least becomes man to assume.

We who are so much in the dark, and who, from Christianity itself, have received only some mysterious intimations concerning the divine proceedings,—we, of all beings who exist, ought to avoid

every proud and lofty conceit which would seem to exalt us above the station in which we stand, and carry us away from the humble duties incumbent upon us as men. But it is only when we attempt to be religious without concerning ourselves in the good of mankind, that our religion becomes useless, or positively mischievous. When their natural union is preserved, the love of God and the love of man invigorate each other. Glory to God on high, and peace and good will to men, were united together in the song of the angels, and ought ever to be in the hearts of men.

# SERMON XV.

## CONNECTION OF MORALITY AND RELIGION.

HEBREWS, x. 38.

"*Now the just shall live by faith.*"

IN a former discourse, my brethren, I endeavoured to shew the superior importance of the moral and social virtues, over those religious exercises, or devout meditations, which are unconnected with the immediate intercourse of man with man. I first shewed, that as the leading characteristic of the divine nature is benefi-

cence, no employment can possibly be so pleasing to the Deity, as an endeavour to promote the good of his creatures; and that the noblest proof of a heart attached to his service, is the humble imitation of his greatest attribute. But farther, if there were any doubt upon this subject, when considered as a general question, there can be none when it is applied to the particular condition of man. What exercises of religion, or what devotion can man exhibit, which are not rather a detraction from the majesty of God, than a tribute of praise worthy of his acceptance? and what greater evidence of the divine condescension, than that he permits himself to be addressed or contemplated by a creature so weak and erroneous? Yet, in the condition of man, how many opportunities are there for the highest display of every social virtue? What noble exertions of

patriotism, of love, of friendship, of generosity, and of justice, may be exhibited amid the passing scenes of mortal life? and what theatre can we imagine so admirably adapted as this world, for supplying these virtues with every opportunity of action?

When these truths impress a mind instructed in religious principles, they will guide its exertions in the best course; they will lead its devotion into the channel of beneficence; they will prevent it from giving way to any thing dark and superstitious in religion, and will supply it with a constant source of activity, of cheerfulness, and of honour. There is, however, an erroneous view of this subject, which, finding a ready assent from the vanity of the human heart, frequently leads men into much vice and misery, while it flatters them

with the delusive prospects of virtue and happiness.

This is the supposition that virtue may exist independently of religion; that the thoughts of God and of futurity rather interrupt than promote the active exertions of man; and that no principle can have so strong an influence on a generous mind, as the love of virtue for its own sake. The bosoms of the young are peculiarly alive to this splendid representation of human nature. The stories of ancient heroism seem to attest its truth; and when we look back with admiration and reverence to those illustrious characters which shed a glory over the darkness of heathen times, we are sometimes disposed to undervalue that light of immortality which the gospel ushered into the world. We turn our eyes from the pages which record the history of saints and martyrs, to those more dazzling nar-

ratives which relate the actions of patriots and sages; and, captivated with the splendour of human virtue in its natural and unassisted form, we are sometimes apt to treat the pretensions to divine illumination as fanaticism and folly.

It thus not unfrequently happens, that the young are betrayed, by the love of virtue itself, into a contempt for those principles from which virtue receives its best support; and the melancholy consequence too often is, that when, in the progress of life, the enthusiasm of morality subsides, the mind, having no steady foundation on which to build, is delivered over to the sway of every accidental passion. It is, therefore, my brethren, of importance to consider that great religious truth, that the true foundation of virtue is faith; that it is "*by faith the just shall live;*" and we shall thus perceive the error of those opi-

nions which represent morality as something detached from religion.

"*Faith* (according to the definition of the Apostle to the Hebrews) *is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*" Consider, then, first, morality in its lowest form; as merely a collection of rules for the prudent conduct of life? as requiring no high exertions of virtue, but recommending only a general habit of inoffensiveness and humanity, proper attention to our worldly concerns, and a temperate use of the enjoyments of life: perhaps it may not appear obvious, that even this lower degree of morality, when it is perseveringly adhered to as a principle of action, has its foundation in a species of religious faith. It has its foundation in a calm and attentive survey of the plan of Providence; in recognizing this plan to be good; and in believing, notwithstanding many contra-

dictory appearances, that virtue is the infallible road to happiness. The rewards, indeed, at which it aims, are merely temporal; yet they are of an higher order than are commonly sought after by the world. They are not the glitter of affluence, nor the vanity of power; but they are the solid comforts of a mind at peace with mankind and with itself. To perceive the superior excellence of such rewards to the common objects of human estimation, the eye of faith is in fact required; that eye which looks beyond appearances; which, amid the glare of vulgar delusion, can trace the finer form of real good, and can descry, with an intuitive assurance, future compensation to be the consequence of present forbearance. This lowest species of virtue, when it is a steady and regular principle of conduct, rests, therefore, upon a kind of observation and belief, which,

if not exactly religion, might yet, without much difficulty, be improved into that principle.

But, secondly, when we reflect on some of the higher characteristics of virtue, characteristics which, to the honour of human nature, are to be traced in all the various aspects of society, and in every age of the world, on what principle do we suppose are they founded? What do we imagine was the secret spring of those heroic exertions which we contemplate with so much admiration in the history of antiquity? What was the firm foundation on which they rested? Were they derived from the declamations of the schools concerning the chief good, from glowing pictures of the beauty of virtue, or any transient enthusiasm of philosophic minds? They were the natural effects of that principle in the soul of man which aims at something

higher and nobler than the vulgar pursuits or pleasures of the world, which feels the native dignity of the human mind, and which, even amid the clouds of heathen darkness, could find the link that binds earth to heaven. In this view, there cannot be a finer or more improving subject of meditation than the lives of the really good men in the heathen world: there cannot be finer exemplification of sound and steady principle struggling with difficulty and darkness, or of that firm assurance and faith which, in spite of the most opposite appearances, leads the virtuous to repose in the appointments of Providence, while they are pursuing their high but arduous career.

That the virtue of these illustrious men received its firmness and stability from religious principle, may appear among other things from the reverence and regard which the best and wisest among

them paid to the religious institutions of their country. Those institutions were bad, and gave support to the most lamentable superstitions; yet they were the best with which men were then acquainted; and it is pleasing to consider how much religious wisdom was still acquired under all these disadvantages, by the virtuous and contemplative.

There cannot, then, be a more grievous mistake, than to suppose that the great characters of ancient times are in any respect exemplifications of the separation of virtue from religion; they are, perhaps, on the contrary, more striking instances than even the history of Christianity can supply, of the close and intimate union between these principles: they are instances of the mighty effects which were produced by concentrating and cherishing the weak and scattered rays of religion then spread

over the earth: they are instances of men acting with firmness and resolution on the imperfect principles which they at that time possessed; holding on in their course with unconquerable spirits; or, in the language of one of their own poets*, maintaining the integrity and stability of an upright mind, even amidst the ruins of a falling world.

Having thus, my brethren, endeavoured to shew, that a principle nearly allied to religious faith has really at all times been the foundation of true virtue, it surely will not be necessary to prove that our religion opens the noblest prospects which can possibly be presented to the soul of man. It opens the boundless prospect of eternity; it holds out to the eye of virtue never-fading rewards; and calls upon man to be strenuous in every

* Si fractus illabatur orbis
Impavidum ferient ruinæ.—Hor.

worthy pursuit, if he would contend for the crown of everlasting life.—It points to those heavenly mansions where the good of every age shall meet after this world has passed away.—It points to that gracious Saviour who has gone before us, and who will, on that day, wipe away all tears from all faces.—It points to the eternal Father of existence, into whose presence we shall be advanced, and who will smile with unclouded beneficence on his assembled children!

Such are the lofty prospects which Christianity places before us as the final consummation of a virtuous life; prospects which remove the veil from the face of Providence, and place the whole plan of God in a clear and obvious light.

How beautifully such prospects encourage and establish the virtue of man, will appear chiefly, if we consider with what facility they accommodate them-

selves to all the varying circumstances and conditions of human life.—The greatest and most prosperous man cannot pretend that he is above them; the poorest feels that he is ennobled by them, and that they lift him from the dust.—They check the presumption of the one, and elevate the soul of the other.—They at once sweep away all the petty distinctions of human life, and open the view of that path which all men equally are concerned to tread. Religious instruction alone is equally applicable to all descriptions of men. It is heard by the king upon the throne. It visits the obscurity of the cottage.—It encourages the poor man to cultivate every good principle of action, as well as the man of exalted rank; to aim at the possession of true nobility of mind; and assures him that he too shall reap his reward, if he faint not.

What then, my brethren, can be so sure or universal a foundation for any scheme of regular and consistent virtue, as that "*faith by which the just shall live;*" and how greatly does it become us, to "*hold fast the form of sound words which we have heard, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus?*"

# SERMON XVI.

THE SAME SUBJECT ILLUSTRATED BY THE CHARACTER OF THE GOOD CENTURION.

MATTHEW, viii. 8.

"*The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.*"

THERE are few circumstances, in the writings of the sacred historians, more useful or important, than those occasional incidents which they have related concerning the conduct and characters of

men, who had no immediate connection with the mission of our Saviour. In such instances, we can trace most easily the natural operation of virtue or vice upon the human heart. In the character of our Lord himself, however beautifully it is softened down to the weakness of man, and however natural it appears in the midst of its perfection, there is yet a height and a purity of principle, which we can but faintly comprehend, and much more faintly imitate. In the characters of the apostles we discover, indeed, very distinctly, the usual tendencies both of virtue and of vice, by which the heart of man is influenced; yet the sphere of action in which they were engaged was so singular and lofty, that we are apt to class them in our imaginations with an higher order of beings, and, in the splendour of their supernatural endowments, to lose sight of that

common nature by which we are connected with them.

It is with such characters as the centurion in the text that we can most readily compare ourselves; men engaged in the common professions, and exercising the common duties of life, whose religious impressions were derived from no miraculous call, and who were rather spectators of the great scheme of divine Providence, at that time transacting in the world, than themselves actively engaged in carrying it on. The incident recorded in the gospel for this day * naturally leads me to make some reflections on the character of that excellent person to whom I have now alluded; a character simple and unpretending, but in the highest degree estimable, and which drew from him, to whom the human heart was known, that

* Third Sunday after the Epiphany.

noble and sublime encomium, that he had "*not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.*"

The leading feature in the mind of this worthy man seems to have been fairness or honesty, which equally influenced him in the conduct of his understanding, and in the regulation of his life. The faith which our Saviour commends in him so highly was plainly the result of this disposition. As a Roman citizen, he must have been disposed to look with indifference, if not with contempt, on the religious sects and opinions of a conquered people; and nothing but that honest love of truth, which seems to have been the guiding principle of his understanding, could have prompted him to inquire into the foundation of the reports in circulation, concerning the character and the miracles of Christ. When he made the inquiry, he appears to have conducted it with much coolness and deliberation; and

the firm persuasion in which it terminated, was established in his mind by a natural process of reasoning, derived from the habits of his own life. He himself, he knew, was a man under authority, having soldiers under him; and likening the great government of the world to that little part of it with which he was conversant, he now believed that he had found the chosen minister of heaven, to whom all authority was committed over nature and man.

While the faith of this remarkable person was thus cautious and deliberate, it yet seems to have rested on no superfluous or impertinent curiosity. We have no reason to suppose, from the sacred historians, that he had himself witnessed any of our Lord's wonderful works, or that he had so much as seen him till he went to implore his assistance for the relief of his servant. The faith, therefore,

in which his mind reposed, does not appear to have been of that overwhelming nature which could not be resisted: it was not the faith of the eyes; but it was more,—it was the faith of the understanding and of the heart.

The strength of his faith, indeed, from these sources, seems rather to have made him avoid the opportunity of having any direct intercourse with our Saviour. He was satisfied with hearing of him and worshipping him at a distance; he felt himself unworthy that so great a person should come under his roof; and had not the call of humanity at last forced him to break through his restraint, it is probable that the humility of his mind would have still kept him from entering into the presence of the Master whom in secret he served. It is not to be wondered at then, my brethren, that when our Lord had conversed with this good centurion, he

should have spoken of him with such distinguished approbation; or that, when he contrasted the genuine and self-taught faith of this unenlightened heathen with the blind and unconquerable incredulity of the chosen people of God, he should indeed have said, that he had "*not found so great faith, no not in Israel.*"

It is not, however, the greatness of the centurion's faith that is alone admirable. The same just and correct feelings which prompted his belief, freed it likewise from every thing enthusiastic or extravagant. He had faith enough certainly to have become an apostle, and he could have followed his Lord into prison or to death. But to this office he was not called, and his humility forbade him to aspire. A mind less duly regulated might, in his circumstances, have formed the splendid purpose of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles; but his qualifications, he

knew, were of a different description, and the line of his duty had already been marked out by providence. He was the master of a family, and, in this capacity, had many private duties to perform. He had likewise a public situation; "*he was a man under authority, having soldiers under him;*" and, in the faithful discharge of the duties which this office imposed upon him, he felt he could be of more essential service to his country and to mankind, than by starting out into a sphere for which he was not qualified by his previous habits. After having obtained from our Lord, therefore, a favourable answer to his request, he immediately returns to the duties which he had left behind him; he is no more mentioned in the history of our religion; his name even is unknown, like the names of innumerable worthy individuals which are nowhere preserved in the re-

cords of men, but which are written in the books of God.

How well the humble duties of his station were performed; how admirably the character of his life corresponded with his religious impressions; how plainly the same principle of a conscientious and honest mind led to both, will appear evidently from the short notices of his private history which the Evangelists have left us. It is evident, in the first place, that he was well acquainted with his own public duty, and enforced the performance of their duty upon others. "*I am a man under authority* (says he), *having soldiers under me, and I say unto this man, go, and he goeth; and to another, come, and he cometh; and to my servant, do this, and he doeth it.*" He was, therefore, deserving of trust in a public station; orderly and active in having the business of it performed; and employing those

only on whose obedience and alacrity he could depend.

While he was thus steady in enforcing the obedience of those under his authority, his kindness and humanity is equally apparent. His authority was strict, but it was merciful and compassionate. Nothing can be a plainer proof of this than the interest which he took in the sickness of his servant. We often hear in the Gospels of men applying to our Lord for the relief of their own infirmities, or those of their near relations, but, perhaps, this is the single instance of a similar application being made in the case of a servant. "And this (as is well observed by a venerable Prelate *) is the more remarkable, and the more honourable to the centurion, because, in general, the treatment which the servants of the Ro-

* Bishop of London's Lectures.

mans experienced from their masters, was very different indeed from what we see in the present instance. These servants were almost all of them slaves, and were too commonly treated with extreme rigour and cruelty. They were often strained to labour beyond their strength; were confined to loathsome dungeons; were loaded with chains; were scourged and tortured without reason; were deserted in sickness and old age; and put to death for trivial faults and slight suspicions, and sometimes out of mere wantonness. Such barbarity as this, which was at that time by no means uncommon, forms a most striking contrast to the kindness and compassion of the centurion, who, though he had so much power over his slaves, and so many instances of its severest exertion before his eyes, made use of it, as we here see, not for their oppression and destruction, but

their happiness, comfort, and preservation."

A more public instance of this man's worth is mentioned by St Luke. In his relation of the same incident, we are informed, that, "*when the centurion heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, that he was worthy for whom he should do this; for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.*" There is something very striking in this circumstance. The centurion, a Roman soldier, loved the nation of the Jews, a people whom the Romans held in contempt and abhorrence. It does not at all appear that he himself had become a convert to the Jewish religion. Although his mind had been deeply impressed by the character and the actions of Christ, it is likely that

he never thought of examining the pretensions of the Mosaic law. This, however, was the religion of the people among whom he resided, and over whom he exercised a command, and, as such, he protected and encouraged it. It appears that, although a Gentile, he in return gained their affections; "*he is worthy* (said they) *for whom thou shouldest do this; for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.*" No more honourable testimony could be brought to the distinguished integrity and benevolence of this conscientious man; and no more beautiful proof can be found, that genuine goodness will conquer the most stubborn prejudices; will overleap the distinctions of sect or country; and, in whatever spot of the earth it is placed, will find the tie which connects it with the great brotherhood of mankind, and will gain, in return, that reward which it

best loves, the cordial gratitude of those whom it protects and fosters.

Such, my brethren, is a very imperfect sketch of the character of this good centurion. It is a character undoubtedly uncommon, yet it is one which is easily open to the imitation of every human being.—In order to attain it, no splendid abilities are requisite, no high exertions.—It is simply the character of a man who is steadily attentive to the voice of conscience, who, in obedience to that voice regulates his religious impressions, and forms the conduct of his life.—It is a character therefore highly deserving our most serious attention. In the faith of the centurion, you see the natural result of this fairness of mind exerted upon the subject of religion. You see it contemplating, with just appreciation, those appearances which were presented to it; reasoning, indeed, but reasoning with sim-

plicity; not seeking to overpower the evidence on which it commented by disingenuous sophistry, but rather satisfied with less evidence than it could easily have attained.—You see this steady and sound faith, leading its possessor to no wandering or enthusiastic fanaticism; not calling him to desert the unnoticed duties of common life: sending him back, on the contrary, to fill his station in society with new and redoubled vigour, and comforting him with the sublime thought, that in the most private offices of humanity, as well as in the greatest and most conspicuous, he might still be "*a fellow worker with God.*"—In the life of the centurion, you see the inseparable connection between faith and works, or the same principle of conscience which guided his understanding to truth, regulating every department of his conduct.—You see these

things, my brethren, and they are given to you as an example, and they call upon you to "*go and do likewise.*"

I shall only observe, in conclusion, that our advantages are in some respects superior to those possessed by the good centurion. His early years were passed under the darkness of idolatry, and it was only after he was advanced in life that his eyes were open to that "*light which has come into the world.*" We indeed have been accounted unworthy, (as he had the humility to esteem himself,) that our Lord should enter under our roofs; but from the period of our infancy we have been in possession of those words which have conveyed the voice of healing to ourselves and our houses. Let us, my brethren, profit as we ought from this advantage, that we may not be numbered among "*those children of the kingdom who shall be cast*

*out into outer darkness,*" but among that innumerable multitude "*which shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven!*"

# SERMON XVII.

ON CHRISTIAN CHARITY, AS IT INFLUENCES OUR JUDGMENTS OF EACH OTHER.

MATTHEW, vii. 1.

*"Judge not, that ye be not judged."*

THE great law of Christian charity is both too little understood, and too little practised. Men will not so far enlarge their minds, as to acknowledge its beauty and excellence; but, contemplating the vices which prevail in the world, they are apt to believe that charity to the of-

fenders is nothing but weakness. In our practice, it is evident that we are constantly liable to magnify our own good qualities, and to look with too great abhorrence on the imperfections of others. Indeed, so vain a creature is man, that there is scarcely any quality, however insignificant, that will not help to raise him in his own conceit: while there are scarcely any virtues so transcendent and estimable, that will secure his neighbour from becoming the object of his hasty censures.

It is my view at present to point out the reasonableness and excellence of charity, and then to enforce the practice of this virtue. Let us then, my brethren, begin with considering those aspects of human nature which present themselves to us, wherever we throw our eyes over this wonderful world. We everywhere behold a being beginning in helplessness

and weakness, smiling on the looks of maternal affection, or crying from the early sense of misery. This creature unfolds its faculties with its years; and before it well knows where it is, the seeds of vice have been scattered in its soul. In some happy minds, the generous shoots of virtue, the early blossoms of wisdom, rise with beautiful regularity over the weeds which entangle their progress; but the human character in general is a disorderly scene, running wild into extravagant passions, or cold, barren, and unfruitful.

Yet in however sad a condition, into whatever disorder man is thrown, he still retains some vestiges of his high original, and never seems entirely lost to the sense of good. When he is a martyr to vice, he hangs his head, and blushes with the consciousness which oppresses him; and if he should be enabled to cast off the

yoke, he yet shews that it is grievous to be borne. The most shameless characters will, in general, be found to be those who have had the least opportunity of knowing what is good; who, from the misfortunes of their childhood, have been thrown loose upon society, and accustomed from their earliest years to low and degenerate infamy. Indeed, on whatever forms of vice we fix our attention, something will occur to palliate; no man will appear radically and innately bad; and the race of men in general, will seem rather to be labouring under a heavy misfortune, than to be the objects of unrelenting vengeance.

If then, my brethren, we could assume the station of some superior being, qualified to sit as judge on man, himself exempt from human weaknesses, and only the spectator of human conduct, even from such a station we could scarcely

look down on this poor mortal creature with any other emotions than those of tenderness and pity. True; we should be astonished with the view of extravagant folly; we should be shocked with the sight of detestable guilt; we should be confounded with seeing a creature formed to be good and happy, immersing itself in depravity, and running headlong to destruction. Yet there would be always something in man which would make pity predominate; and when we gazed in horror at the hardened ruffian, dealing in blood and breathing fury, we should still recollect the innocent playfulness of the same creature, while yet a child in its mother's arms.

Such seems to be the aspect in which man has appeared to the great Being from whom he originally proceeded, and who, notwithstanding all his wanderings, has yet not discarded for ever this pro-

digal son. Some beings, we are told, of a higher nature than ours, have lost themselves so far, and have been guilty of such flagrant disobedience, that the Almighty has abandoned them to destruction. But to man an extraordinary rescue has been granted, and the most compassionate of all Beings has been sent into the world to instruct, to comfort, and to die for him. Solicitations and entreaties have been made to call in the greatest sinners; and no human being appears too mean and despicable, to receive the offer of heaven and of eternal happiness.

Such is man in the eye of God; what, then, ought he to be in the eye of man? Wilt thou pretend to despise him whom God esteems so highly; and wilt thou judge harshly of thy brother, for whom Christ has died? If superior beings were to regard the vices of man with detestation merely, unmixed with pity; if God

were to leave him to his own devices, and to that destruction which he so often seems to court, what answer could be made, and who should dare to arraign the justice of the Most High! But thou, O man, who art thyself spotted with inquity, wilt thou pretend to look with cold and contemptuous severity on the failings of thy brother? When God himself has consented to sink his indignation against sin in his pity for the offender; when the good angels look down upon their earthly brethren with kind wishes for their success, and with sorrow for their failings, wilt thou, who thyself requirest all this mercy and pity, fix upon any one of the human race a severe or contemptuous eye? I know what thou wilt say, that thou art not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican; thou fastest twice in the week; thou givest tithes of all that thou possessest; yet the

publican, who standeth afar off, and will not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smiteth on his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner; this man will go down to his house justified rather than thou.

Indeed, the circumstance, which is one of the fundamental tenets of Christianity, that every man is a sinner, this circumstance affords an unanswerable argument for mutual charity and forbearance, and ought to dispose every one to judge as favourably of his neighbour as he possibly can. If I have been guilty of innumerable vices; have every day done those things which I ought not to have done, and left undone those things which I ought to have done, is it at all to be tolerated, that, instead of being afflicted for my own transgressions, I should pore upon those of my surrounding brethren? Am I, who have myself a corrupt-

ed nature, whose judgment is vitiated by disorderly passions, who have a kind of unnatural satisfaction in discovering the vices of others, that I may appear more perfect in my own eyes; am I, in any respect, a competent judge of the real merits of any one of mankind? Some subordinate judgments, indeed, we must form, sufficient to guide us in our conduct among men; we must learn whom to consort with, and whom to avoid; the nature of society requires that we should be separated into nations, and parties, and sects; and the purest principles of Christianity will always be found to accommodate themselves to the state of the world in which we live. But, in all our judgments and decisions upon men, we must never proceed beyond what is plain and apparent; we must not too finely trace the outward qualities to their radical recesses in the heart, nor pretend to say any

thing of the soul, that sacred and immortal thing, which spurns at the judgments of men, while it trembles before those of God.

On this subject, my brethren, it is scarcely possible to avoid touching on a point which has occasioned more want of charity than perhaps any other in the world; I mean religious dissensions. And yet it is strange, that religious men should split upon this rock, when they are expressly told, that "*charity is the end of the commandment.*" This malignant spirit is supported by a sort of reasoning, which, at first sight, seems abundantly conclusive, but which, if it were just, would be exactly the strongest thing that could be urged against religion, since nothing can bring religion into so much discredit, with men of good sense and good hearts, as the dark and gloomy spirit which sometimes seems to inspire its adherents. The

sort of reasoning alluded to is this:— There are certain doctrines urged in scripture as necessary points of faith; some men retain these, and others lose sight of them; and the believers, accordingly, think themselves entitled to reprobate those who err from the true creed. But this fearless kind of reasoning rests entirely on the idea, that a point of faith is of any consequence whatever, while it continues an empty speculation in the head, without producing a due effect on the heart and dispositions; an idea the most wild and extravagant. As if the Author of our religion had any desire to make us very skilful and knowing, in respect to the world of spirits, and did not merely inform us of those things, the knowledge of which might render us better men. Whatever points of faith, then, we may have attained, let us never presume to think ourselves above those to whom

these things may yet be hidden, unless we are conscious of some real improvement in our lives, corresponding to the faith which we have attained. On the contrary, let us rather confess, with humiliation, how little influence our faith has upon our lives; and, instead of being ready to condemn those who differ in belief from ourselves, let us rather fear, that, at the great day of reckoning, we may be found to have believed more, and yet to have performed less.

The only objection which, as I conceive, can be urged with any plausibility against all this doctrine is, that it tends to throw too great laxity into our moral judgments,—that it detracts from the dignity of virtue, and may loosen the foundations of faith. For it may be said, that if we acquire a habit of being gentle to the vices of others, we shall certainly be more ready to pass but

a slight censure on our own; and if we do not pursue improper opinions with an indignant zeal, we shall be too apt to lose our ardour in the cause of religion.

Now, it must certainly be granted, that a man may very possibly fall into an indolent unconcern about all principle whatever; and that, in this state of mind, he may conceive himself to be very charitably disposed towards all the errors in human conduct or opinion, when he is only very indifferent about what men either think or do. But this defect in moral principle is not charity; for that eminent quality will always be found to exist in the highest perfection in the minds of those whose virtue is the most pure. Such men do not shut their eyes on the vices of others, or look on those vices with indifference and unconcern. They condemn the crime, but they spare the criminal, and are very far from suppos-

ing the worst motives, when better may be suggested. It is, indeed, the steady pursuit of virtue in their own conduct, which prevents them from searching too busily into the secrets of other mens' hearts: having a great enterprize to perform themselves, they have no time to spare for those nice investigations. One observation is undeniable, that he who was the great pattern of human virtue, and who perfectly understood all the polluted sources of human conduct, was yet more remarkable for the most indulgent charity than perhaps for any one quality whatever; and if, in the whole course of his conversation among men, he was ever induced to utter so much as a harsh expression, it was on those occasions only, when he was shocked with perceiving a want of charity in others.

Having stated, in this general way, the reasonableness and excellence of uni-

versal charity, and the small ground which any man has to pass a severe judgment on his neighbour in any one point whatever, I proceed to enforce the practice of this virtue. And, first, it may be proceed from the comfort and satisfaction which it will naturally give to the minds of those who cultivate it. What can be a more desirable turn of mind than to think the best we can of every one with whom we have any connection; to have a satisfaction in discovering his virtues; and to hope that his vices are not radical and incurable? Such a disposition, while it is quite free from the imputation of weakness and want of discernment, is sufficient to keep us always alert and cheerful, free from morose and harsh opinions, on a good footing with the world and with ourselves. If we are disposed to look for it, much virtue we shall undoubtedly find; and,

in general, the vices of men will appear to be so intermingled with good qualities, that we shall always find something pleasing to relieve our minds amid the shades of the darkest picture. On the contrary, nothing can afford more discomfort to the mind than the uncharitable passions, as suspicion, fear, and religious bigotry.

But, secondly, if we cannot be incited to a charitable disposition by the pleasure attending it in this life, let us be stirred up to it by the apprehension of the judgment to come, which is the argument of the text. "*Judge not, that ye be not judged.*" We shall have enough to answer for at that awful period. Our imperfect devotion; our irregular lives; our constant attachment to the fashion of this world, which passeth away,—such habitual deficiencies, with many other particular sins, will then rise up against

us, and can only be blotted out by the merits of our Redeemer. Let us not add to the shameful catalogue, dark and malignant judgments concerning each other; but, as we hope on that day to be saved by love, let us now shew that we have some feeling of the principle which alone can then be our protection.

# SERMON XVIII.

## ON CHRISTIAN CHARITY, AS IT INFLUENCES CONDUCT.

ST JOHN, xiii. 34.

*"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another."*

IT may seem somewhat extraordinary that this should be called a new commandment, or that any revelation should be requisite for the purpose of bringing home to the human heart those principles upon which the love of mankind depends. That the principles of piety can-

not be well inculcated without some sort of divine discipline, may appear sufficiently plain; but nature we may imagine, surely leaves us at no loss respecting those affections which ought to prevail between man and man. The seeds of justice and humanity are sown in our frame; and although we may very often be defective in our practice of those virtues, yet we can scarcely, it may be thought, remain blind to their obligation.

It is this view which seems to have misled several philosophical inquirers in modern times, who, while they have enlightened the world with many excellent observations on social duty, have not, however, perceived that they are at all indebted to Christianity for the principles upon which they proceed. Yet it would be deserving their consideration, whence it has happened that they are so much better instructed in these particu-

lars than the wise men of the heathen world; or why, among errors and extravagancies of their own, they have yet scarcely advanced one solid position, the prototype of which is not to be found in the Gospel?

The peculiar advantage of the law of Christian charity consists in the universality of its application. In the first place, the whole system of fair and equitable dealing is comprehended in the maxim that we should do to others whatsoever we would that they should do to us. It is impossible that we should ever injure a fellow-creature if this rule were carefully observed. Considering what, in his circumstances, we should have a right to expect as our due, we cannot but perceive the monstrous injustice of refusing it to him. The observation of this maxim would at once banish every thing like wrong out of the world;

and the whole conduct of mankind would be regulated by principles of the strictest justice.

In the second place, the maxim that we should love our neighbour as ourselves, carries us much farther. By this we are not only prohibited from doing wrong, or commanded to fill up the measure of equity, but we are excited to acts of extensive beneficence. Our Saviour's answer to the question, Who is my neighbour? shews very plainly how far this commandment reaches, and points out, in the most touching manner, that wherever we can find an opportunity of doing good, there our neighbour is also to be found.

The third maxim, which completes this system of benevolence, carries us as far as it is possible to go, and much farther than men conceived their duty required before the gospel was introduced

into the world. "*Ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.*" In this rule of enlightened morality, we are taught to overlook in some degree the distinctions in the characters of men; to disregard the accidental variances and oppositions into which we may happen to be thrown in this world; and, amidst all the vices and follies which may be prevalent around us, and amidst all the hostility which it may be our lot to encounter, still to contemplate, with affectionate regard, that common bond of human nature by which every one man is united to every other.

It has been justly objected to some modern systems of benevolence, that while they inculcate an unaccountable regard for

the interest of the human race in general, and make that the only principle of action, they in a great degree tend to extirpate all those private feelings and affections by which alone human society is maintained. But while the charity inculcated in the Gospel is as comprehensive as can be conceived, it is by no means liable to this objection. Every good affection of the heart, love to parents and benefactors, and friends, is encouraged and promoted by it. It is most assuredly our duty to befriend virtue, and to oppose vice: while we have enemies we must resist them; nor can we avoid feeling the natural sentiments of resentment and indignation: Christianity supersedes not any one of those principles of our nature, though it regulates and restrains them all: it has always protected, never unhinged the established order of the world: the general interests of mankind, it instructs us,

are in higher hands than ours; and every man promotes them best while he keeps the station in which Providence has placed him. Yet, amidst all this attention to every private feeling natural to man, amidst all its regard for the order, and even for the prejudices of society, Christianity teaches us a still higher lesson; and, leading us at times to forget that we ourselves are actors in this busy and distracted scene, it lifts us to that serene eminence from which we may contemplate all the conduct of man with the temper and benevolence of heaven. It is perhaps in our meditations alone that we can reach those feelings of extensive charity; yet these meditations are not without their influence on our practice, and restore us to the intercourse of men, with the wish and resolution to "*love much*," "*to suffer long*," "*and to hope all things*."

Such, my brethren, is a very faint exposition of Christian charity, or of those affections which our religion inculcates, as due from man to man. The system commonly prevalent in the world, it is evident, is of a very different nature. Men are, in general, very partial in their affections, indulgent to some, and quite inattentive to the feelings of others; few are disposed to engage heartily and perseveringly in the practice of beneficence; hatreds and animosities, of the most irreconcilable nature, frequently rising from the most trivial causes, generally prevail; and it is difficult to find a person who will for a moment allow himself to suspect, that, in those differences, there is any possibility he may be in the wrong.

If men will examine themselves, they will accordingly find, that there is very wide scope for divine instruction in this extensive branch of their duty; and sure-

ly, to listen to such instruction ought to be an employment of the greatest pleasure and delight. What more delightful, than to feel that we may live in love and harmony with our brethren; that there is no insuperable bar dividing the hearts of men from each other; and that there are certain plain rules, which, if impressed upon every individual, would infallibly convert the world into a region of love and happiness?

But, perhaps, you complain of the ingratitude of mankind, and say, that although you were to love them, they will not love you in return. You will say, perhaps, that, in early youth, you gave way to the kindly emotions of your nature; that you saw little vice in the world, and expected much friendship; you were suspicious of none, and kind to all; but experience has taught you another lesson; you have met with much deceit, and

much ingratitude; in spite of your feelings, your heart has been contracted, and you now find it wisdom to be as regardless of others, as they have been of you. This, my brethren, is a complaint which is not unfrequently made; but I suspect not often with much foundation. They who complain so much of the ingratitude of mankind, have seldom been hearty in their service. They fix upon a few instances of disappointment in their expectations, and these they magnify beyond all measure. The world is bad enough; but it contains much gratitude. There probably never was any man who sincerely engaged in the service of mankind, without receiving testimonies of gratitude, which have overwhelmed his heart.

* Reflections of this nature are particularly incumbent upon those who are

* Preached before the Communion.

about to kneel down at the altar of Christ. As his example is the great model of all virtue, so is it in nothing more conspicuous than in the purest love to mankind; and the service in which some of us are now to be engaged, is the commemoration of the most signal instance of that love. We are going to stand at the foot of his cross, to behold the sufferings which he endured for our sake, and to partake in the benefit of his body and blood. Can we, my brethren, approach to this holy service, and retain in our hearts any malice to any one of the human race? Shall we not here, if anywhere, forgive our brethren their trespasses, when we behold the pledge that ours have been forgiven?—Shall we complain of the ingratitude of men; when we hear our Lord praying for his enemies in the midst of his agony, and saying, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?*" Or, shall we not

be prompted to perform all the good within our limited power, when we are contemplating that beneficence which embraced a world?

# SERMON XIX.

ON THE LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THE AFFLICTIONS OF LIFE.

ECCLESIASTES, vii. 2.

"*It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart.*"

MEN of an irreligious turn of mind frequently raise objections against the goodness of God, from the multiplicity of evils and distresses with which human life abounds. Men of piety, on the contrary, behold, in this very circumstance, some

of the most conspicuous proofs of a watchful and kind providence; and from the bosom of grief and wretchedness, they derive their strongest hopes and firmest reliance on the protection of their heavenly Father. Nothing, indeed, can be more certain, than that the heart of man frequently requires to be corrected; that when every thing in this world proceeds in an even and prosperous course, then the heart is most infirm, and most liable to sink under temptation; and that, in those circumstances, the bitter potion of adversity is by far the most salutary medicine which can be administered for its cure.

While, therefore, in such afflicting dispensations, men of profane minds see nothing but the cruel hand of a blind and undistinguishing fatality, those who are influenced by the sentiments of religion perceive, on those occasions, most clearly

the kind interference of the physician of their souls; and if they have lost sight of him in their hours of gaiety and pleasure, are sure again to become conscious of his visitations in the season of perplexity and trouble.

But although the evils incident to man might thus be shewn to be a most necessary part of the divine dispensation, it is at the same time, to be remarked, that, although very various and greatly multiplied, they yet by no means constitute the leading features of human life; even in this imperfect condition, in this lower stage of our existence, ease and tranquillity are the portion of mankind in general; and if some are more peculiarly marked out for misery, while it is in their power to profit by their troubles, and "*to come forth like gold when they are tried,*" others may derive great instruction, from merely contemplating their distresses.—

This milder discipline, this acquaintance with human misery, which is to be learned from observing it in other men, this method of acquiring wisdom, which may often obviate the necessity for our being subjected by providence to any very severe chastisements in our own persons, is recommended to all men by Solomon in the text; and he enforces it by a comparison, which must universally be felt, because it appeals immediately to the ruling propensities of our nature. We all love pleasure, mirth and gaiety; love to have our hearts lightened, our cares cast aside; to have no fears for the future, no melancholy recollections of the past; and to grasp the fleeting enjoyments of the present moment. All men, in a word, love to frequent what the wise man calls the "*house of feasting:*" now, to show in a striking manner the advantages to be derived from an acquaintance with human

misery, he declares, that "*it is better to go to the house of mourning.*"

It is apparent, indeed, at the first view, that the "*house of mourning*", is a school of serious thought and reflection; a school, too, which at all times stands open for our reception, and in which we may learn our lessons without cost or pains. In "*the house of feasting,*" we evidently do not learn to think, but rather have our thoughts lost and dissipated; and, while we gain nothing substantial there, we are often betrayed into the forfeiture of our respectability and our virtue. I do not, however, propose at present to continue this comparison; it will be more useful to consider, with attention, a few of the lessons with which the house of mourning may supply us, and to which the words of the text particularly direct our thoughts.

We are desired to go to "*the house of mourning, for that is the end of all men,*

*and the living will lay it to his heart.*" In these words, I conceive three things to be either implied, or expressed.—The advice, that we should "*go to the house of mourning,*" supposes that we shall sympathize with the sufferings of those who mourn.—"*For that is the end of all men,*" is a sentiment expressive of pity and love to mankind.—"*And the living will lay it to his heart.*"—These words infer religious wisdom as the great improvement to be made from all the scenes of human misery. Sympathy, charity, and religion, are therefore the three most important lessons to be learnt in the house of mourning, and, whoever learns these, will be fully instructed in the whole duty of man.

The house of mourning, then, is the school of sympathy. This disposition is natural to man, and is the most lovely part of our nature. But in no particular are our hearts more liable to be corrupted

and vitiated; as we proceed in the world, our affections are ever prone to be concentrated upon ourselves, and selfishness, that most fatal depravation of our nature, is at all times too ready to seize upon us. We are encouraged in it by many circumstances. Sometimes pride, or a high opinion of ourselves, renders us indifferent to the feelings of others; sometimes the pursuit of pleasure subjects all our affections to our own paltry gratifications; or the cares and business of the world occupy all our thoughts, and leave us no room for considering the desires and wishes of our brethren: or, finally, mere indolence may often indispose us from giving that attention to the concerns of other men, which may bring trouble and uneasiness to ourselves.

To put a stop to the course of this depravity, nothing can be more effectual than going to the house of mourning,

than beholding the sufferings of our fellow-creatures, and permitting our hearts to be penetrated by the natural sentiments of humanity. It is owing to our ignorance, or our forgetfulness of the distresses which everywhere surround us, that we are rendered so indifferent as we often are to the feelings of each other, and wrap ourselves up in thoughtless insensibility. If we would inquire into them with diligence, and look at them with our own eyes, it is impossible but that our hearts must be affected, and that we must feel as it becomes men. There is no need, to be sure, for a weak and sickly sensibility; that disposition is more frequently employed in finding out food for the fancy, than in mending the heart. But a luxurious indulgence of the softer feelings is never produced by the sight of real misery. The sympathy which is drawn out by real suffering, is always ac-

companied by a sense of duties to be performed; it never stagnates in the breast idly inactive, but flows out in beneficent exertions.

In the second place: The house of mourning is the great school of charity, or of that love to our fellow-creatures, which overlooks all distinctions, and views them in the single and endearing aspect of men and brethren. "*For that is the end of all men.*"—These striking words level all disparities, and place every human being on a footing of equality. We are all weak, frail, mortal creatures: here is our point of union, in whatever else we may differ. One man is rich, and another is poor; one man sways the rod of empire, and another drags out his life in abject slavery: The mind of one glows with enlightened views and liberal attainments, while dulness and stupidity cloud the apprehensions of another. Farther still; one

man is virtuous, and another is wicked; one bends before the throne of God, and acknowledges the power that made him, while another pursues his depraved inclinations, and thinks not of the account which he must render to his Judge. Such are the distinctions which prevail in the world; and men become elated with such distinctions, and grow vain in their own conceits, "*and their foolish hearts are darkened.*" In consequence of these disorderly thoughts, want of charity prevails; men lose sight of the common tie which binds them together; and one half of the world looks down upon the other, as unworthy its notice and regard.

Hast thou lost sight of that common tie? Go then to the "*house of mourning,*" and be no longer a fool. Those distinctions which excite thy pride, and lead thee to despise thy neighbour, what are they? They may serve thee to boast of

through a short and fleeting life; but will they save thee from the common destiny, which marks thee out a frail and perishing creature? In "*the house of mourning*," thou wilt see that circumstance in which all men are assimilated; the bond of weakness and misery by which all are connected. Thy wealth, thy power, thy abilities, even thy virtue, and thy religion, are all subjected to the frailty of thy mortal state; an uncertain and precarious existence enters equally into the description of every man, and in this affecting circumstance we may see the true foundation of brotherly union and love.

I proceed, in the third place, to shew, that, in the house of mourning, we learn the best lessons of religious wisdom; "*for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart.*" Why should he lay it to his heart, unless there were something beyond this "*end of all men?*"

If the curtain closed in the house of mourning for ever, it would be better to drive away from our hearts than to lay to them, a reflection which would only be melancholy, and could be productive of no good; and, accordingly, such is the use which some men of the gayer sort have made, from contemplating the house of mourning. They have drawn from the consideration of the shortness of life, arguments for the freer enjoyment of it while it lasts: "*Let us eat and drink* (they say) *for to-morrow we die.*" But this is vanity and delusion, and is never the voice of nature. The natural effect of the house of mourning is to throw us into sober reflection; to call back our scattered thoughts; to make us feel our present weakness; and to turn our eyes with serious apprehension to the awful events of futurity.

Two impressions particularly favourable to religion, humility and hope, are forced upon the mind on such occasions. When we contemplate some striking instance of "*the end of all men,*" is it possible not to be impressed with a sense of our littleness, and of our entire dependence on the Almighty hand, by which we are raised or brought low? When power, or genius, or worth, submit to the common fate, and are swept from the earth, do we not immediately exclaim, What is man! and perceive but one Being whose operations are without controul? Must we not then be convinced, that all the occupations and concerns of human life carry in them an admixture of vanity, and that those circumstances on which we ground our self-consequence, are really futile and insignificant? We shall, accordingly, feel humiliated and astonished at ourselves, and shall bend beneath the

fear of him who is the arbiter of our eternal destiny.

It is very apparent, then, in what manner humility and religious awe arise from the contemplation of human misery. That religious hope should flow from the same source, may not be so easily explicable; yet I believe nothing is more true; and that celestial stream which bends its course into the regions of light, and waters the tree of life in the midst of the garden of God, rises in its greatest purity from the deep abysses of affliction. When every thing around us appears dark and cheerless; when all the world, with the whole race of man, seems a vain, fleeting, and disorderly scene; then it is that the light from above breaks through the clouds which envelope our souls. The suggestions of nature, and the boldness of faith, are supported by reason. When we behold man brought low, and his beauty

laid in the dust, we cannot reasonably think that the great Parent has deserted his offspring for ever; and the greater his fall, and more complete his apparent degradation, the more reason, perhaps, have we to look for some splendid change from the wonder-working hand of Providence.

Such are the suggestions of religion on the view of any of the great calamities to which man is subject, particularly in the contemplation of death; and here, indeed, is the triumph of Religion! This is the province peculiarly subject to her command, and in which she moves with the dignity of a sovereign. In the heat and hurry of the world; amid its business, its intrigues, and its pleasures; she may lift her voice, but it will not be heard. She will fly from the pride and the ingenuity of the sophist; she will avoid the questions and perplexities of the divine;

and her simplicity may too often be lost or obscured in the ambitious eloquence of the preacher. But "*go to the house of mourning,*" and there you will find her active and employed. In those secret retreats of sorrow, you may still hear the gentle but authoritative voice of Him who was acquainted with grief: "*Why make ye all this ado and weep, the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.*"

Enough has been said, my brethren, to justify the assertion, that the house of mourning is the best school which we can frequent, if we wish our hearts to be really improved, and to learn our duty either to God or man. Our duty to man we shall find to consist in kind attentions and brotherly love, which surely the view of his sufferings is of all things the best adapted to call forth. And how can we better learn our duty to God, than in contemplating the striking instances of

his power exhibited in the fate of man, and in lifting our thoughts to those higher views which open amid the shades of death? How can we better learn that humble acquiescence in his providence, which becomes our frail and feeble condition; or the necessity for that obedience to his will, by which alone our hope and faith can be invigorated and confirmed!

# SERMON XX.

ON RELIGIOUS CONSOLATION IN AFFLICTION, EXEMPLIFIED IN THE CASE OF THE DEATH OF CHILDREN.

MATTHEW, ii. 18.

"*In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.*"

THESE words of the prophet Jeremiah are applied, as you know, by the holy Evangelist, to that very extraordinary and horrible incident which he relates in

this chapter; the massacre of the young children, perpetrated by Herod, in the hope that the infant king of the Jews would thus be sacrificed to his jealous fury. In this expectation he was disappointed by the overruling hand of Providence; and we who, in a distant age and country, meet at this day for the purposes of religion, in the name of the child who was then spared, know, I trust, in what manner to value and to adore that watchful goodness, which, while it permitted the hearts of the mothers of Bethlehem to bleed, was yet laying firm, for all future generations of men, the foundation of their happiness and their hopes. To such extensive views of divine Providence, it is the delight of religion to conduct the serious mind, and to clothe, with a mantle of celestial light, the most melancholy appearances which this lower world exhibits. In the first instance, indeed, na-

ture fixes our thoughts on the appearances alone; and when, as in the incident before us, we read of the mandate which the tyrant "*sent forth to slay all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under,*" we can, for a time, listen to no voice, except that which long before had resounded in the ears of the prophet, "*the voice of lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted.*"

In the hour * in which I speak, my brethren, such a voice, I fear, is but too frequent in the houses of our city; and many a tear is now falling from the eyes of parents over the lifeless remains of infant innocence and beauty. The same God, who, on one memorable occasion, permit-

* February 1808, when the disease of the Measles was fatally prevalent.

ted a bloody tyrant to be the minister of his inscrutable designs, in the destruction of holy innocents, more frequently sends disease among the young of his people; and, year after year, as at the present hour, many a spotless soul returns to him, untried by the dangers, and unpolluted by the sins of that earthly course on which it had begun to enter. It is an hour in which even Religion must for a time be still, and listen, with sacred respect, to the voice of nature, which, even in its excesses of "*lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning,*" is yet the voice of God in the human heart. When she may speak, however, Religion can utter the words of consolation; and it is her office to seize upon those hours when the hearts of some are broken with affliction, and when many are trembling with apprehension, and to press those lessons of wisdom, which are

heard too often with indifference, in the pride and the gaiety of common life.

The sentiment expressed in the text accords with the feelings of human nature. The death of young children, excites, perhaps, more "*lamentation and great mourning*" than any other incident in the course of mortality. To those who are not parents, a dispensation of this kind may seem, perhaps, of a much less afflicting nature than many others. A child is but an insignificant object in the eye of the world, and seems but a trifling loss to society. To a parent, however, those very circumstances, which render his child of little value to others, are the most attractive. It is his delight to retire from the serious cares and busy occupations of men into the unanxious scenes of childish playfulness; to repose his thoughts upon some countenances on which the world has left no traces of care, and vice

has impressed no marks of disorder; and to find within his own house, and sprung from his own loins, some forms which recal the image of primæval innocence, and anticipate the society of heaven. When these innocent beings are torn from us, we suffer a calamity with which a stranger, indeed, will imperfectly sympathize, but of which the heart knoweth the bitterness; and the sorrow may only be the deeper, and more heartfelt, that it must be disguised and smothered from an unpitying world.

The death of a young person, advanced to years of maturity, occasions a general sympathy. The grief of parents is then at once felt and understood. When talents, which gave the promise of future distinction, and virtues, to which the declining years of a parent clung for support, are torn from the domestic circle which they blessed and adorned, there are

few hearts so much closed to a fellow-feeling with human calamity, as not to be powerfully affected with such circumstances of deep distress. But this very sympathy of mankind is a source of consolation which alleviates the affliction by which it is occasioned. The sorrow excited by the death of a young child may often be as acute, but it is attended with much less sympathy. Here, too, parents have formed hopes which are only, perhaps, the greater and more unbounded, inasmuch as the foundation on which they rest is less certain and definite.—These hopes are frustrated for ever: their child is as if he had never been; even his memory has disappeared from every heart but their own: and they cherish it with the deeper feeling, that there is no other breast in which it dwells.

To such sorrows of the heart, my brethren, it is the office of Religion to apply

the words of consolation; and when the first tumults of grief are at an end, to inspire the soul of the mourner with loftier sentiments. She suggests, in the first place, that, in the kingdom of God, there is no loss of existence; that the hand of infinite wisdom changes, indeed, the sphere of action in which the rational soul is destined to move, but never deprives it of the being which the hand of beneficence bestowed. She points to a higher world, in which the inhabitants are "*as little children;*" and she hesitates not to affirm, that the soul of infant innocence finds its way to that region of purity, the air of which it seemed to breathe while yet below. She speaks here with a voice of confidence which may sometimes fail to be inspired, even from the contemplation of a long life spent in the practice of virtue. The best men have contracted many failings in the course of their earth-

ly trial; and when we commit their bodies to the dust, while Religion calls upon us to look forward to their final destiny with holy hope, she yet permits some foreboding fears to cloud the brightness of the prospect. In less favourable cases, all we can do is to withdraw our minds from the vices of the departed, and rather to fix them, with apprehension and purposes of amendment, upon our own; to raise our thoughts, at the same time, to the perfect goodness of God, which seeth the secret springs of the heart, and judges not as man judges; which will forgive whatever can be forgiven, and which hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked. But when we follow to the grave the body of untried innocence, we at the same time restore to the Father of spirits the soul which he gave, yet unpolluted by the vices of time, and still an inmate meet for eternity. When the tears of nature are

over, faith may here look up with an unclouded eye, and see that Saviour, whose descent upon earth cost so many tears to the mothers of Bethlehem, now speaking comfort to the mothers of his people, and telling them, that he who here below "*suffered little children to come unto him*," still delights to throw around them the arms of his love, when, like him, they have burst the bonds of mortality.

Besides this lofty source of consolation which Religion opens up to afflicted parents, she, in the second place, suggests to them some of the wise purposes which Providence may have in view in this afflicting dispensation. Although the ways of Heaven are confessedly dark, and although we must, in many instances, bow down in resignation, without pretending to examine them, it is yet more pleasing when we can discover

some of the designs which may be intended, and we are thus more easily reconciled to the evils which may accompany the execution of them. In the death of children, Providence seems, on a hasty glance, to be acting in a manner contradictory to its own plan; to be destroying life ere it is well begun; to be depriving us of blessings which we can scarcely be said to have tasted; and while with one hand it gives, with another to be taking away. Let it however be considered, that it answers an important purpose in the government of the world, to keep men in mind of the constant sovereignty of God, and of his right to the entire disposal of the fate of his creatures. Let it farther be recollected, that we are prone to forget the hand from which our blessings flow, and that too often we do not discern its agency till these blessings are withdrawn. It is thus not an unpleasing

aspect of the ways of Providence, to consider the death of a child as an interposition of God, by which he awakens the slumbering piety of the parent, and, by depriving him of the object of his mortal affections, leads his thoughts to immortality.

We are all well aware, my brethren, of the influence of the world: we know how strongly it engages our thoughts, and debases the springs of our actions: we all know how important it is to have the spirits of our minds renewed, and the rust which gathers over them cleared away. One of the principal advantages, perhaps, which arises from the possession of children, is, that in their society the simplicity of our nature is constantly recalled to our view; and that, when we return from the cares and thoughts of the world into our domestic circle, we behold beings whose happiness springs

from no false estimates of worldly good, but from the benevolent instincts of nature. The same moral advantage is often derived, in a greater degree, from the memory of those children who have left us. Their simple characters dwell upon our minds with a deeper impression; their least actions return to our thoughts with more force than if we had it still in our power to witness them; and they return to us clothed in that saintly garb which belongs to the possessors of a higher existence. We feel that there is now a link connecting us with a purer and a better scene of being; that a part of ourselves has gone before us into the bosom of God; and that the same happy creature which here on earth shewed us the simple sources from which happiness springs, now hovers over us, and scatters from its wings the graces and beatitudes of eternity.

To you, then, who have suffered from the present visitation of Providence, Religion thus unfolds the sources of consolation and of improvement. She calls upon you not to mourn as those who have no hope; to give the children of whom you have been deprived into the hands of your and their Father; and, when the first pangs of affliction are over, to lift up your thoughts with that faith toward him, which may at last enable you to meet them in his presence for ever. Yet while she calls you not to mourn, she does not ask you to forget. This perhaps may be the language of the world. The loftier language of religion is, that you should remember whatever may contribute to your purity and virtue; that you should sometimes meditate with holy emotion on those angel forms which are gone before you; and that, amidst the temptations of the world,

you should call to mind, that their eyes are now impending over you, and feel the additional link which binds you to the higher destinations of your being.

To those of us, my brethren, over whose houses the Angel of Death may now have passed, let not the scene which we have witnessed be unaccompanied with instruction. While we fall down in gratitude before Heaven for the deliverance which we have hitherto experienced, let us confess that it is undeserved; that we have not, as we ought, blessed the giver of all our good; and let us henceforth resolve to have his goodness more constantly in our thoughts. Let us sympathize with our brethren in affliction, and feel that their sorrow may soon be ours. Above all, let us make it our firm resolution, to train up those children whom God may have spared to us, in the knowledge of him and of his

laws, that, at whatever hour of their future life the call may come, they may be found of him in peace, and that we too may, with them, glorify him in heaven.

# SERMON XXI.

## ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

PROV. xxii. 6.

"*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.*"

IN these words, my brethren, the wise man points out powerfully the effects of early education. As the mind is very liable to the influence of habit, it is a happy circumstance that it can acquire good habits as well as bad, and that the infant heart can be moulded to the love of vir-

tue, no less surely than it may be misled into vice and disorder. This is a consideration which affords both a pleasing view of human nature, and is of the utmost importance in a practical light. It is farther a consideration which imposes a most forcible obligation on parents and instructors. It suggests to them, that to their hands the fate of the rising generation is in a great degree committed; that they must in no small extent be responsible for the future deviations of the children entrusted to their care; and that, if they would have these children walk in the way in which they should go, the attainment of this invaluable object is in a great measure left to themselves.

The importance of education in supplying the mind with intellectual acquisitions, or in adorning it with accomplishments, is very generally acknowledged and understood; and perhaps the pre-

sent age is in no respect more distinguished from those which have preceded it, than for the systematic attention with which these ends are pursued. The effects have corresponded with the application bestowed in producing them; and the general prevalence of liberal thought and refinement of manners in our day, affords a striking contrast to the more contracted opinions and grosser habits of "our fathers, and of the old time before them." That we have been equally attentive to the more important objects of moral and religious instruction, I will not take upon me to affirm: I fear, on the contrary, we are too often in the habit of permitting the minds of our children to fall under the dominion of accidental impressions on those great subjects, on which their views and feelings ought to be most precise; and, while we omit no pains in improving their powers, or ad-

ding to their accomplishments, we too frequently throw out of the account that higher wisdom, which may prepare them to be virtuous here, and heirs of eternity hereafter. This most necessary branch of education, my brethren, it is the duty of this place to recommend; and I am naturally led into these reflections by the return of the present season *, in which the young of our congregation are brought here to shew their acquaintance with that simple form of Christian instruction compiled by some of the greatest fathers of our church, who, while they were employing their mighty powers in shaking the pillars of Romish superstition, could yet find opportunity, like the master whom they served, to "*suffer little children to come unto them.*"

The catechism which is commonly

* Season of Lent.

taught in this church contains a short and beautiful compend of Christian faith and duty; and it is pleasing to know that the young are regularly instructed in it. The ministers of religion, however, have perhaps little opportunity of knowing more than the simple fact; they cannot judge accurately of the degree of weight which the infant mind attaches to the truths of which it is thus informed. It is more properly the business of parents to discover whether their children are really making any progress in religious knowledge, and in impressions of duty; and little more, perhaps, can be done here, than to enforce upon parents their obligations of this nature, and to facilitate the means by which they may carry these obligations into effect.

With these views, I propose to dedicate the present, and at least one other dis-

course, to some explanatory observations on the church catechism, in which, while I direct my thoughts chiefly to parents and instructors, I shall at the same time endeavour to make myself easily intelligible to the young themselves.

The first circumstance which presents itself to us in opening this short summary of religion, is the vow which was entered into for the child before he was himself capable of forming any conception of the subject to which it related. The circumstance is striking and instructive. It shews us, in the first place, that there was no period of our existence in which we were not under the eye and the cognizance of religion; that the spirit of our Lord hovered over us while we were yet in the cradle; and that, when the waters of baptism were poured upon our heads, a solemn vow was made upon earth, and recorded in heaven, that we should be-

come "members of Christ, and children of God." It, secondly, reminds those, to whom the care of the young is committed, of the strong obligation under which they lie, to provide for their moral and religious instruction. It reminds them, that, besides the obligations of nature and conscience, there is a particular and express vow entered into with God, which it rests with them to see fulfilled; and that, when they neglect this important duty, they are not only deaf to the voice of the heart, and of moral reason, but are provoking the wrath of an insulted Deity.

In the third place, the baptismal vow reminds the young, that on some points their minds are not left at perfect liberty; that there is a sacred obligation upon every human being, of which the vow made at baptism is an external sign, to direct his thoughts and actions to the best ends; and whatever they may afterwards

be told of the native freedom and independence of their minds, this vow calls to their recollection, that they never can be set free from the obligation of believing what is true, and of doing what is right. Instead, therefore, of that confident spirit with which the young sometimes are tempted to follow out their own untutored ways of thinking and acting, a much more humble and amiable spirit is insinuated into their hearts in this form of instruction; and to the question, "Dost thou not think that thou art bound to believe, and to do as has been promised for thee?" they are taught to reply, "Yes, verily; and by God's help so I will. And I heartily thank our heavenly Father, that he hath called me to this state of salvation, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. And I pray unto God to give me his grace, that I may continue in the same unto my life's end."

The second circumstance which is brought before us relates to the particular engagements comprehended under the baptismal vow. Three things, we are told, are promised and vowed for children in baptism. "First, that they should renounce the devil and all his works; the pomps and vanity of this wicked world; and all the sinful lusts of the flesh. Secondly, that they should believe all the articles of the Christian faith. And, thirdly, that they should keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of their lives." With regard to the first of these considerations, it may perhaps, at first sight, seem unwise to bring before the imaginations of the young the existence of wickedness which their own innocence does not naturally lead them to discover; and certainly it would be unwise and pernicious to present this fact to them in any form which may have a tendency to cloud their

imaginations, or to depress their spirits. Such, however, is the condition of man in this world, that it is probably impossible to keep concealed, even from the mind of a child, the existence of vice in some form or other. In the language of scripture, man has eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and has thus subjected himself to the necessity of being warned to avoid evil, as well as of being animated to pursue good. It is in fact, therefore, one among many proofs of the unsophisticated wisdom of ancient times, that the compilers of the catechism have touched, though very lightly and delicately, upon this melancholy circumstance in the condition of human nature, and have thought it incumbent upon them to warn the young, even at the first dawn of reason, against the malignity and infamy of sin, no less than to elevate their views to the lofty objects of faith and of duty.

Secondly, it is engaged for the infant at baptism, that he shall believe all the articles of the Christian faith. In inculcating these upon the minds of children, the method to be adopted seems very admirably pointed out in our catechism. To the request, "Rehearse the articles of thy belief?" the answer is simply the repetition of that short form of "*sound words*," commonly known by the name of the Apostles' Creed. This creed, you will observe, contains nothing more than a bare statement of facts, without any attempt being made to deduce from them points of doctrine. Such, my brethren, seems to be clearly the method in which *children* ought to be trained in the truths of religion; and when this method is adopted, there seems to be no such difficulty, as is sometimes apprehended, in giving them a competent acquaintance with these invaluable truths. Some ingenious men have con-

ceived, that religion was a subject totally beyond the reach of childhood, and that it ought only to be brought before the view of the human mind, when it has attained its full powers of reason. Without stating some very obvious objections to this scheme, it may be sufficient to remark, that it is certainly not the course pointed out by nature. Parents, who themselves possess religious sentiments, are certainly prompted by nature to communicate these to their children; and if the voice of nature be listened to, it will direct them likewise in the course which they ought to take in doing so.

With respect to the first article of the creed, for instance, the foundation of all religion whatever, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth"—there are surely many simple methods in which a wise instructor may insinuate this great truth into the dawn-

ing reason of childhood. Some occasions must present themselves, in which the mind of a child may be led to recognize the traces of wisdom and benevolence in nature, and may be taught to ascribe its own little pleasures and enjoyments to the bounty of an unseen benefactor. The great volume of creation is open to every eye; and, while it contains pages which may exercise the highest powers of created intelligence, it likewise abounds with innumerable passages, in which even the eye of childhood may discover the character of its author. It is one of the improvements of modern education, that means have been found to make children soon acquainted with the simpler parts of the economy of nature; with the habits, for instance, of the lower animals, and with many of those natural productions which minister to the pleasures and to the uses of mankind. Is it not possible, in the

midst of these lessons, to point out to the child the secret finger of wisdom and goodness; and while his mind is gradually opening to the reception of knowledge, at the same time to warm his little heart with the first emotions of piety?

The remaining articles of the Creed relate to the facts of revelation, which, if I am not mistaken, may be inculcated upon young minds in an easy connection with the natural sentiments of religion. When a child is once informed of the superintending care of a Father in heaven, he will naturally be disposed to listen to any information which can be given him, concerning the dealings of this Almighty Father with the children of men; and although, in the volume of the Scriptures, there are many passages which are very far beyond the comprehension of children, and which, therefore, ought not to be put into their hands, there are in-

numerable others which almost seem to be written for the sake of children. Such are some of the simple narratives in the Old Testament; the history of Joseph and his brethren; the early part of the history of Moses; some particulars in the history of David; and many other detached passages, which make a powerful impression on a youthful imagination, and convey religious and moral truth in the most pleasing of all forms. The history of our Lord, as it is related in the Gospels, is in like manner full of interest to the youngest minds; his manner of conveying instruction, is, for the most part, suited to their years: his parables are little stories, which they can easily remember; circumstances in his miracles, which may, perhaps, perplex and astonish persons of advanced years, serve only to captivate their fancy; and it is not difficult for a prudent instructor, if they should

sometimes be disposed to ask questions which cannot be answered in a satisfactory manner to them, or, perhaps, to any human being, to lead their thoughts to those circumstances which they can fully comprehend.

In this branch of religious instruction, there is one view, to which the minds of children, and of the young in general, ought to be particularly directed, I mean to the character of our Saviour. His connection with a higher nature than ours, renders him an object of peculiar reverence to the young mind, to which he is first introduced; but the simplicity, and the gentleness of his virtues, render him still more an object of love and confidence. It is not, perhaps, one of the least wonderful circumstances in this divine character, that while it is encompassed with the rays of Deity, and, in all the trying circumstances of human

fortune, carries a form so lofty and commanding, it is yet quite level to the feelings of a child. The fact is, I believe, it is more likely to be felt by children than ourselves; from this plain reason, that, in some of its most striking peculiarities, their minds are as yet less distantly removed from it.

My object in recommending this part of Christian instruction in a peculiar manner to parents and teachers, is not merely because it is so simple, and so very full of moral and religious wisdom, but from another reason. We are very apt to complain, my brethren, of the progress of infidel opinions among the young, when they go out into the world, and begin to speculate for themselves. We do not, however, always see very distinctly the root from which such opinions take their rise. It is not so much by the arguments

of infidel writers, which, very often, they do not understand; nor even by the poignancy of their wit and satire, that young men are so frequently tempted to relinquish all faith in the religion of their fathers. Infidelity owes its conquests in our days, I am induced to believe, to a cause more honourable to human nature, to the impression made upon the minds of the young, by the specious or real virtues of those by whom that bad cause has unfortunately been supported. These writers commonly assume a high tone of liberal sentiment; many of their works are put into the hands of the young, as the standard books from which very useful information is to be obtained in the course of their studies; and when, as is quite natural, they inquire into the private history of these writers, they frequently discover them to have been men of amiable and irreproachable manners.

In the meantime, in what aspect does Christianity appear to them? Too often in no other light than as a collection of inexplicable doctrines, to which they never attached any distinct idea. When they examine its history down to the present day, they too often have it represented to them in no other view, than as the source of wars, and vices, and bigotry; instead of seeing in its ministers the genuine spirit of glory to God on high, and peace and good will to men, the page of history exhibits the priesthood to their eye in all the dark colours of pride, and violence, and gloom, and hypocrisy. If our sons, then, my brethren, abandon Christianity, it is because they never knew what Christianity is; because they are ignorant of its spirit, and of its genuine influence on the heart. If they are misled by their admiration of infidel philosophers, it is because their young

hearts were never impressed, as they might have been, by the character of him to whom Christianity owes its origin *.

* I do not know that I have ever met with a finer picture of the peculiar excellence of our Saviour's character, than in the following passage from the late Bampton Lectures of Mr Penrose, a work in which an important argument is illustrated with much learned and liberal discussion, and which contains many profound and original observations.

"The even and unaffected propriety (says he) of the virtues of Christ, none of them distorted, and none unreasonably preponderant, discriminate him not only from corrupted and mistaken men, but even from the wisest and the best.—As he was superior to the imperfections of our nature, so even in his excellencies he exceeded not that strict and even tenor, which those imperfections alone render it pardonable or proper for man to exceed. His character, though full of strength and meaning, is in nothing extravagant—in nothing disproportioned. He was pious, but not enthusiastic; temperate, but not austere; meek, but not abject; and heroic, but not rash. In the history of the most illustrious of mankind, we can, in general, readily trace their prominent and striking qualities. But in the character of Christ, though a character positively great, as well as unexceptionably pure, there is no one quality which predominates above the rest. All the virtues are so

Were this character once fairly fixed in their minds, it would, I will venture to affirm, continue to maintain for ever,

intimately and harmoniously blended, that, to use an appropriate, though obvious metaphor, the whole of their colouring disappears. They are simply and uniformly luminous.—Nor can this union of all the virtues in one perfect character be considered as less singular or impressive, because the several virtues may be thought naturally to coalesce, and the same causes which are friendly to the production of one, may, in a similar manner, be supposed friendly to that of all. This supposition may be true in part, but it is not true universally. The causes which tend naturally to improve the contemplative, are not calculated to promote the active virtues. The causes which promote the active, do not improve the contemplative. No one thing can be more different from another than the education of a philosopher from that of a hero. Calmness and regularity are the nurses of the one: difficulty and distress the energetic preceptors of the other. The different excellencies which we expect from each are the natural results of such different preparations of the mind. We require, in the philosopher, a cool and uniform tranquillity, and a life occupied in the serene investigation, or the undisturbed communication of truth. In the hero, we look for a certain warmth of temperament, as not less proper than it is natural. We demand not that he should choose his object

in their apprehension, its just and evident claims of superiority over every other name, either ancient or modern, among

of pursuit with sober judgment and philosophical discrimination, but that he should pursue whatever object he may choose, with an earnestness and vigour which a philosopher does not possess; with an intrepidity undivided by doubt, and unchanged by misfortune, with contempt of danger and death. In Christ, and in Christ alone, are the separate excellencies of these different characters united in their full perfection. It is the exact union of the contemplative and the active virtues which seems to constitute his chief peculiarity. And, eminent in truth as each of these characters is by itself, little as it is to be expected that they should be found united in the same person, yet we should, at least, have wanted that full internal evidence of his truth, which we now find in the character of Christ, had they not been united in him. Had he been the hero only, much as we might have admired his fortitude, or his zeal, yet we might justly have demanded the signs of divine wisdom in him, who claimed to be the immediate messenger of heaven. And, though men of mild and studious dispositions seem often to have supposed that a calm and dispassionate tranquillity includes every excellence of the mind, yet, I confess, that something more might reasonably be expected in a perfect example of life, proposed, not only to the approbation of sages, but also to the imi-

those who have at any time undertaken to enlighten, or to reform the world; and if they also were tempted to go away, they

tation of all men. I know not why the hardy and the active should be deemed less essential and important than the retired and contemplative virtues. They may be less characteristic of the philosopher, but they are not less useful to mankind, nor are they less calculated to elevate their possessor above low and selfish passions. It is certain, that they are not less conspicuous in the holy Author of Christianity. However eminent for a philosophical equanimity, he is equally to be distinguished by the praise of an heroic fortitude, and exertions of the most sublime beneficence. Where else is the same combination to be found? Could we even suppose that an impostor or an enthusiast might have disregarded the offer of a crown, or been unmoved by the treachery of a disciple, can it be possible, however, that possessing this meek and tranquil disposition, he should have persisted in a uniform career, from the commencement to the close of his ministry, always firm, though never impetuous, never abashed by obloquy, never disconcerted by ingratitude, never forsaken by the dignity which became the Son of God."—*Penrose's Bampton-Lecture Sermons, entitled, "An Attempt to Prove the Truth of Christianity, from the Wisdom displayed in its original establishment, and from the History of False and Corrupted Systems of Religion."*—P. 147--151.

would then say, in the affectionate language of Peter; "*Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*"

I have already, I am aware, occupied your attention much too long; and shall only add in conclusion, that while you are thus engaged in instructing the minds of your children in the simpler views of natural and revealed religion, you will greatly improve your own ideas and sentiments upon these subjects; you will discover what in your private meditations, or in the writings of men, you may not always discover, how plain and unperplexed a thing religion is; and when, in the language of our Lord, "*you suffer little children to come unto you,*" you will then best see what is "*the kingdom of heaven!*"

# SERMON XXII.

## ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

JOHN, xiv. 15.

"*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*"

THAT faith is nugatory, unless it be productive of good works, or, in other words, that faith can in no other way be known but by its fruits, is a truth so evident to natural reason and common sense, that it would never have been called in question by the wildest enthusiast, unless, from some error in their religious education, men had been accustomed to separate in their minds the doctrines of reli-

gion from its practical influence, and to rest their thoughts on the former of these, unaccompanied with any reference to the latter. It is this error which has infused into religious controversy so dark a spirit of malignity and virulence; which has disgraced the Christian church in every age, by vain attempts to penetrate into mysteries totally removed from the reach of the human understanding; and which has clouded in a veil of unmeaning words, even from the eye of childhood, those simple truths which at once meet with the assent of the uncorrupted mind to which they are proposed, and which lead so naturally to the love and the practice of goodness.

To obviate this error, and the fatal consequences to which it leads, I recommended it to you, my brethren, in a former discourse, to fix the views of your children on those parts of religious in-

struction which are quite plain, and which must be interesting to them, leaving, till they arrive at a maturer age, those doctrines which they cannot now comprehend, and which to them have no practical consequences. It was the practice of St Paul to feed "*the babes in Christ with milk and not with meat*:" a maxim, which, if Christian instructors had in general been as anxious to imitate the profound sagacity and the liberal spirit of this great apostle, as to perplex themselves and their disciples with those passages in his writings which even St Peter acknowledges are hard to be understood, would have freed the world from much bigotry, much fanaticism, and much infidelity.

The compilers of our catechism having, in this spirit, instructed the young in the first plain truths of religion, proceed to render these truths important to them,

by shewing their connection with the duties of life. They have, first of all, pointed out some of the most striking of these duties, in that form of words which was of old delivered to the people of the Jews; and they afterwards concentrate the spirit of the ten commandments under the two heads, of duty towards God, and duty towards our neighbour. The general result of the whole is still more shortly expressed by our Saviour in the well-known passage, "*thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*"

There is something in the character of childhood which easily receives the impression of this law of love. When

the infant mind is elevated to a sense of Deity, it naturally recognizes in the Supreme Being the image of parental affection; and when it is not misled by an unhappy education, it is disposed to look up to God with that "*love which casteth out fear.*" It is at this period easily impressed with the feeling, that to "serve him truly all the days of our lives" is the first of duties, and one which must render us happy in the performance. In like manner, a benevolent interest in the good of our fellow-creatures is easily recognized by a young mind as the dictate of the heart; and whenever any circumstance is mentioned which may excite its compassion, or whenever its sense of justice is awakened, it will often be found to possess these sentiments in much higher perfection than after it has been trained in the discipline of the world. It is accordingly of great importance in edu-

cation to exercise the moral sensibility of children; to state to them imaginary cases, or to take advantage of real incidents, by which their moral judgments may be exerted, and by which their attention may be withdrawn from their own selfish feelings, to a quick sympathy with the feelings of others. But, on these general principles of religious and moral education, I cannot pretend, my brethren, to afford you any instruction; and I am the less induced to enter upon the subject, when I recollect the many excellent works * which have been written upon it, and which are in the hands of every parent.

Among the ten commandments there are two which, in a more peculiar manner, interest the minds of the young,—that which enforces the observance of the Sab-

* Mrs Hamilton, Miss Edgeworth, &c.

bath, and that which requires duty to parents. They are the commandments which have most efficacy in guiding their steps into the paths of piety and virtue. The institution of the Sabbath is the great means by which a sense of religion is kept up in the world. It is a standing memorial of the divine administration; and cannot fail to impress, even the youngest mind, with feelings of reverence for that great unseen Power, before whom the children of men are taught with one accord to bow, and, for the sake of whose worship, a stop is regularly put to the common occupations and amusements of life. It is under the influence of such feelings that religious impressions spring up at first in the human heart; and the most common symptom of their departure is shewn in a disregard for that sacred institution by which they were originally fostered. Let it, therefore, my

brethren, be an object of your care, to impress the minds of the young with a reverence for this sacred day. Let them be early accustomed to apply it to the purposes for which it was designed; to such meditations upon God and his laws as are suited to their opening minds; and whenever they are capable of the exercise, let them on this day join you in your public and private devotions.

At the same time, be careful that they associate with the return of the Sabbath no ideas of gloomy restraint. Bear always in mind, that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath; and while on this day you lead your hearts to the feelings of piety, at the same time shew them, that the day which God has set apart for himself, is a gift of unspeakable mercy to man. Shew them, upon this day, the labourer reposing from his toil, and in the bosom of his family, and

in the house of his God, feeling, notwithstanding the hardships of his humble condition, that he too possesses the best blessings of life, and the well-grounded hopes of futurity. Shew them, upon this day, even the lower animals partaking in the general repose, and the same watchful goodness which gives relief to the man-servant and the maid-servant, providing likewise for the comfort of the cattle. If they are required on this day to suspend the ardour of their common amusements, yet shew them, by your own example, that there are occupations suited to it, which may fully interest and employ their minds. Carry them along with you to visit the houses of poverty; let them witness the joy and the gratitude of relieved indigence; and impress them with the feeling, that they are then most truly worshipping God, when they are his ministers of good to man. To minds thus early trained in

the true spirit of the Sabbath, that day will through life continue to return with a cheerful and animating aspect; and, instead of becoming a source of weariness, as it too often is to the higher ranks of society, or of being profaned by unsuitable cares and amusements, it will for ever protect them from the contagion of an irreligious and worldly spirit, and will afford them a happy relaxation from the common business of life.

The commandment which recommends duty to parents, is placed immediately after those which relate to our religious duties, and is with much propriety put at the head of the moral law. It is, in fact, the moral duty which resembles religion more nearly than any of the others, and probably, for this reason, was in ancient times known by the name of piety. It is, indeed, pleasing when we look into the history of the heathen world, to discover

the force and authority which was attributed to this obligation; and while, in their religion, we are shocked with the spectacle of the most blind and melancholy errors, to find that they were yet in possession of a principle which might, in some degree, stand in the room of religion. This duty is what, of all others, the young can most distinctly comprehend. They are inured to the habits which it requires, before the obligation itself can be impressed upon their minds. It is a duty to which nature leads them, as well as religion, and which, when it influences them as it ought, must have the happiest consequences upon all their conduct. The truest honour which can be shewn to parents is by obedience, and a ready inclination even to anticipate their commands. This leads to the practice of all virtue. The sacred regard to parental authority, when once it has become a ha-

bit of the mind, is afterwards transferred with ease to the authority of conscience and of God.

To these imperfect observations on the laws of duty, I shall only add, that the best precepts will have little influence on the minds of your children, unless they are accompanied with your own example. Let them see, my brethren, that you are yourselves lovers of God and of goodness, and your precepts will then have an influence beyond your own expectations; and even while you give no precepts in words, your lives will give them for you. How should they believe in God, fear him, and love him with all their heart, and mind, and strength, if you, who instruct them to do so, seem indifferent to his laws, and regardless of his institutions? Or how should they honour their father and their mother, if you endeavour not to exhibit characters which they may ho-

nour? If you, in your own conduct, are worthy of honour, your influence with your children will not die with yourselves. When you are in your graves, and when your direct authority over them is at an end, your venerable forms will still seem to rise up before them, and they will still, in the hours of trial and temptation, hear your voices calling them into the paths of purity and virtue.

That part of the catechism which is adapted to the instruction of children concludes with the important and interesting subject of prayer. The observations which afterwards follow on the sacraments are intended for those who are advanced to that period, when they may take upon themselves, in confirmation, their baptismal engagements, and are preparing to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Upon these points I may, on some future occasion, address you; at present

I conclude with one or two remarks on the subject of prayer, which is opened so simply and beautifully in the following words:—"My good child, know this, that thou art not able to do these things of thyself, nor to walk in the commandments of God, and to serve him, without his special grace, which thou must learn at all times to call for by diligent prayer. Let me hear, therefore, if thou canst say the Lord's prayer?"

The prayer which follows we are all well acquainted with. It is the prayer which our Lord taught his disciples, and in every age of the church it has been received as the most perfect form in which men can address their Father in heaven. In our present view, it is the prayer which we teach our children: and it is not one of the least of its beauties, that, while it comprehends all the petitions which are useful to men, it

is expressed in so very few and plain words, that it is quite level to the feelings and understandings of children.

Of prayer, in general, it may be said, that it is an employment to which the infant mind naturally applies itself, and it is one which is peculiarly adapted to purify the springs of religion from gloom and apprehension. The habit of making our wants known to God in prayer can only be learned successfully in our early years: When we advance in life, we have too little religious simplicity to apply ourselves to it with unwavering faith. It is the child only who never disputes the efficacy of prayer, and has a full feeling of the force of our Saviour's words, that as "*his Father will not give him a stone when he asks for bread; much less will his Father in heaven refuse to give good things to them that ask him.*" The habit of prayer is, at

the same time, we all know, of the utmost importance, both for supplying us with strength in the performance of our duty, and for infusing comfort into our hearts in the hours of adversity.

Close, then, my brethren, as you are here directed, your instructions to your children, with teaching them how to pray; and now, let us, along with them, "desire our Lord God, our heavenly Father, who is the giver of all goodness, to send his grace unto us, and to all people, that we may worship him, serve him, and obey him, as we ought to do. And let us pray unto God, that he will send us all things that be needful, both for our souls and bodies; and that he will be merciful unto us, and forgive us our sins; and that it will please him to save and defend us in all dangers, ghostly and bodily; and that he will keep us from all sin and

wickedness, and from our ghostly enemy, and from everlasting death. These things let us trust that he will do of his mercy and goodness, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

# SERMON XXIII.

ON RELIGIOUS RITES.

1 COR. xi. 26.

"*For as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come**."

CHRISTIANITY is in nothing more remarkable, than for the simplicity by which it is characterized. In point of faith, it requires the submission of the heart to the reception of divine truth,

* Preached before the Communion.

much more than any peculiar capacity for understanding abstruse doctrine; and where men are willing to receive instruction, it will always be supplied them in a sufficient degree for securing the great object of religion, the salvation of their souls. In point of morality and practice, Christianity holds out to men the most sublime and the purest lessons; it, at the same time, speaks to them as they are men, and, making allowance for the frailty of their natures, it enjoins them to do their best, and to trust that their imperfect endeavours will be rendered acceptable with God, through the perfect merits of one who lived and died for their good.

The same character extends to the external rites and ordinances of Christianity. They are quite simple, easy to be performed, and such as must give joy, instead of trouble, in the performance, where the heart is at all affected with the serious

impressions of religion. Thus the institution of the Sabbath, one day in seven on which man and beast are permitted to rest from their labour, and a pause is put to the ordinary business of the world; on which, in some measure, all distinctions are removed; and all men, the high and low, the rich and poor, seem to occupy the same place, that of creatures bending before the throne of their Creator; a day on which, in the Christian institution, nothing heavy is imposed upon men; "*no burdens hard to be borne;*" but the simple offerings of praise and thanksgiving, and of prayer from a pure heart, are alone required from all who come before their Maker, depending on the intercessions of their common Mediator;—what institution could possibly have been devised, more free from vain pomp, or more comfortable to human nature?

In like manner, the two Christian sacraments, which our Lord himself enjoined on his disciples, are rites very simple and easy, and refer, in a beautiful manner, to the most interesting of all events. The sacrament of Baptism, by which we are initiated into the church of Christ, and the privileges of the gospel covenant, requires only a small sprinkling of water; and, by means of that element, shadows out the most excellent of all the benefits which God has conferred upon man; no other than that purification of the soul which is effected by the Holy Spirit, and is promised to all those who sincerely ask it. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper, for which we are now preparing, is equally easy in its performance; and if we attend to the several circumstances of it, it will appear to be a very beautiful institution, and admirably adapted for affecting the mind with those

impressions which our Lord had in view in enjoining it. A few observations to this purpose may be attended with use; and I shall, therefore, beg leave to draw your attention, first, to the circumstances in which this sacrament was instituted; secondly, to the mode in which the rite is performed; and, lastly, to those impressions which it is meant to convey to the mind.

First, The circumstances in which this sacrament was instituted are detailed by the Evangelists, and by St Paul, in that part of his writings from which my text is taken; and never, surely, in any story, was there a collection of particulars so very interesting. Our Saviour knew that the close of his important life was at hand; that the design of his mission was about to be accomplished; that he was soon to pass through his last and most difficult trial; that already one of his disciples had consented to betray him;

that the rest would desert him in his distress; that all would be offended because of him that very night, for "*the Shepherd was to be smitten, and the sheep of the flock to be scattered abroad.*" With these thoughts labouring on his mind, he resolved yet to have one meeting of love and easy intercourse with those whom his father had given him, and whom "*he loved unto the end;*" and, making use of the opportunity presented by the feast of the passover, "*when the even was come,* (says the Evangelist) *he sat down with the twelve.*"

Such was the interesting period at which the sacrament was instituted. "*The Son of Man was about to be betrayed into the hands of sinners.*" All his exertions for the sake of the human race were to meet with this unworthy return! His prophetic eye saw the scenes which were preparing; beheld the machinations of hell; and he who loved mankind so well, must have been

affected with the deepest sorrow, that they were to become the instruments of such shocking depravity. Thus, like a father on his deathbed, surrounded by his children, he sate among the disciples, informing them, in terms too plain to be misunderstood, that he was not long to be with them. With a view of impressing them strongly with the awful importance of the events which were about to happen, "*as they were eating,* (we are told) *he took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to his disciples, and said; Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins.*"

It may be remarked, that this method of instituting a memorial of his death, was quite in the manner adopted by our Lord in all his instructions, and in his common

conduct, It seemed part of his plan, to shew that wisdom might be collected from every incident, the most trivial, and that the most serious truths might be impressed upon the mind from the occasion of very slight events. Thus his instructions were constantly drawn from some of the circumstances in his own or his disciples' situation; and every common occurrence in their lives he turned into a source of useful doctrine. On this occasion bread and wine were incidentally on the table before them; and, by a natural reference to his body and blood, to which these elements bore some resemblance, he made them symbols of the most important event which was ever to happen in the annals of time.

The beauty and interesting nature of this sacrament appear, accordingly, from attending to the circumstances in which it was instituted. Secondly, let us attend

to the manner of its observance. The event to be commemorated is the death of our Saviour for the sins of the world. The manner in which this is commemorated, is not in sackcloth and ashes, in tears and lamentations, and stripes and penance. We are not required "*to give our first born for our transgression, the fruit of our body for the sin of our soul.*" We are not desired to go forth on pilgrimages to the holy sepulchre; to collect from every quarter relics of the cross; and to wear out the sacred pavements in prostration and kneeling. Nothing harsh; nothing burdensome; nothing melancholy is required from us. We are only desired to meet in fellowship around the table of our Lord; to personate the holy apostles; and to receive the sacred elements which he formerly distributed to those well-tried servants, when he met them for the last time before his death.

We are desired to kneel down together with the kind affections of Christian brethren, of men who partake in the same misfortune, and who look forward to the same deliverance. Perhaps it may not be going too far to say, that the very form of this sacrament is a proof, that, in the whole course of our Christian warfare, nothing is expected from us which requires any very extraordinary or violent exertion. Our Saviour has done so much, that we are desired to do little more, than with faithful and honest hearts to look forward to the completion of his work. He asks nothing that is grievous and distasteful to our feelings: he only bids us remember him; and the manner in which we are to remember him, is not with downcast and sorrowful countenances, but with glad hearts, and by a social and friendly ceremony. "*This do in remembrance of*

*me.*" What? Nothing more, than "*to eat this bread, and to drink this cup.*"

I proceed, in the third place, to point out those religious impressions which the sacrament of the Lord's supper is designed to fix upon the heart. These are implied by St Paul in my text: "*as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*" The first thing remarkable in these words is, "*ye do shew the Lord's death.*" Let us then, my brethren, contemplate this circumstance, the Lord's death, and we shall see what meditations ought to employ us while we celebrate this memorial of it. It was, then, the death of one who, through the whole course of his life, shewed the most ardent love to mankind, and who never seemed employed to his own satisfaction if he was not forwarding the good of man and the glory of God. The death of the best of men

would, in itself, be a very affecting circumstance, even although it were attended with no reference to us. We read with admiration and delight the stories of illustrious heroes, of the wise and good in all ages; and when, as has very frequently happened, these men have fallen a sacrifice to the barbarous policy of their opponents, or to the factious fury of the populace, we follow them into their last scenes, and look up to their unbending fortitude, in their hours of trial, with feelings of reverence mixed with sorrow. Suppose, then, the author of the Christian faith to be nothing more than a man; to be a great moral instructor, "*who went about doing good*;" yet, even in this view, he bears the highest character for every virtue which has ever yet shone forth in human nature, without the smallest taint or admixture of vice and pollution. The death, therefore, of

this distinguished person, especially since, in the circumstances attending it, he displayed so remarkably all his eminent qualities, the qualities of fortitude and patience, of resignation to the will of God, and brotherly forgiveness to man, is really the most interesting object which we can contemplate in the whole history of mankind, even although it had no consequences, and were an event terminating in itself. It is, of all others, the best adapted to impress upon our minds worthy principles of conduct, and to make us in love with the beauty of virtue.

But when we go on to contemplate the death of Christ in the religious view, as the great sacrifice made for sin, without which we could never have had any certain assurance of forgiveness; when, enlarging our views, we discover that this wonderful person was not a man merely, but was also one "*who, being in the form*

*of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;"* when we take this view of the subject, surely the contemplation of that important event, of which the sacrament of bread and wine is the symbol, is calculated to enforce upon our minds impressions of deep regret for our sins, and hearty resolutions of amendment. These sentiments of repentance and purposes of reformation, flowing from the sacred source of gratitude, must surely have the happiest effects upon our lives, if we are at all honest and sincere. Whenever we partake in the holy communion, they will naturally rise in our minds; the occasion will suggest them to us; and it rests with our-

selves to encourage and strengthen them, so as that they may not be formed in vain.

The next thing which the words of the text suggest to us, is the second coming of Christ, to which the faithful look forward, when all his promises will be completed, and those whom he approves will be made happy with him for ever. This is likewise a natural subject of meditation when we approach the table of our Lord. Were he still in the dark repositories of the departed, and had we no hope that he would ever be restored to us, we might remember him with lamentation and weeping, but scarcely with bread and wine. The very form of this sacrament, therefore, justifies St Paul's explanation of it, that, in it we shew the Lord's death, in the belief that he will come again; and, in this consideration, many very serious impressions are invol-

ved. For, when he comes again, he will come in the glory of his Father, to judge the world. He will no longer wander over an obscure part of the earth, a poor and neglected man, scorned by the wicked, and scarcely acknowledged by the good; suffering all the misfortunes incident to human life, and, finally, enduring the punishment of a criminal: but he will appear "*sitting on the right-hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven,*" and every kindred, and tongue, and nation shall be gathered before him. If, therefore, we determine to be good and faithful servants, we are well assured that our Master has the power, as well as the will to reward us; and we have every reason to rejoice in the hope that is set before us. But "*if we be evil servants, and say in our hearts, our Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to smite our fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drun-*

*ken,*" then we know that "*he will come in a day when we look not for him, and in an hour that we are not aware of, and shall cut us asunder, and appoint us our portion with the hypocrites.*"

Such seem, my brethren, to be the kind of reflections which the sacrament of the Lord's Supper will naturally suggest to us; and surely they are very salutary, and well deserving our frequent consideration. It, therefore, greatly becomes us to take every proper opportunity of "*eating this bread and drinking this cup,*" for the sake of strengthening all our good resolutions, and of confirming our faith. "*The night* (says the apostle) *is far spent, and the day is at hand.*" Let us steadily keep this principle in view, and it will enable us to bear up under every difficulty, and to resist all temptation. We ought to be thankful that, by the institution of this sacrament, our Sa-

viour has given us a solemn opportunity of frequently calling to mind the great leading maxim of the Christian life, that we are strangers in a foreign land; travellers through a scene of dangers; combatants in a serious warfare; and that we must fix our eyes on our true country, and bear up through faith and hope. Let us then be careful not to neglect those opportunities, nor to avoid that gracious invitation which he has given us. We cannot well deserve the name of Christians, if we will not attend at the table of our Master.

# SERMON XXIV.*

ON RELIGIOUS RITES.

ISAIAH, vi. 7.

"*And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.*"

THESE, my brethren, are the concluding words of a very sublime passage, in which the prophet Isaiah describes a remarkable vision which had been presented to him, and the feelings which it had given rise to in his mind. "*In the year* (says he)

* Preached after the Communion.

*that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims; each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."*

I have chosen the words, from the natural reference which they bear to the late solemn occasion of our assembling in this place. We, too, like the prophet, were in the temple of the Lord, and we beheld him in spirit sitting upon his lofty throne. We, too, were admitted into the presence of celestial beings, and we heard the blessed in heaven, and the good upon earth, crying one unto another, and saying, "*Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.*" In that hour, my brethren, which of us did not feel the self-abasement of the prophet, and say in his heart, "*Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.*" Yet the altar before which we were assembled was the altar of mercy and redemption; and the bread of life which "*touched our*

*lips*" conveyed to our consciences a stronger assurance than even the live coal, or the voice of the seraph, "*that our iniquity is taken away, and our sin purged.*"

The subject into which I am led by these reflections, is the consideration of two prevailing sentiments, which the meditations, and the more solemn ceremonies of religion, naturally inspire; sentiments which are productive, in particular, of the best consequences, when we rise from the altar of our Saviour. The first sentiment which the contemplation of religious objects inspires, is a deep sense of their dignity, and of our littleness. Whether we look abroad through nature, and trace the Deity in the magnitude of his works; in the sun which flames above our heads; in the splendour of the starry heavens; or in the rolling billows of the deep; or, when retiring from the contemplation of nature, we look into the depths of the

Divine Providence; the laws by which a moral creation is upheld; the traces of the Divine hand in the course of human affairs; and especially the stupendous scheme of revelation; on such occasions, we are struck with an overpowering sense of the excelling glory of the Lord, and are lost in equal astonishment at our own littleness and imperfection. It is then, that, with the prophet, we behold the train of the magnificence of God filling the temple of earth and of heaven; and that, with the psalmist, we cry aloud, "*What is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him?*" It is then, too, that we feel struck with a sense of our offences, of our imperfect and wandering exertions in the service of this mighty and all-bounteous God; and that we feel the full force of the sentiment of Isaiah, "*Woe is me! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips.*"

Amidst such humility and self-abasement, the first sentiments of religion rise in the human heart; and in the heart of a being like man, who is ever prone to weakness and to sin, such feelings must ever accompany all his religious impressions. Yet they are not, as the world supposes, sentiments merely of gloom and depression. They are melancholy and severe, but they are sublime! Man is weak and sinful, and he feels that he is so, and cries out, that he is perishing in the waves, and is undone; yet he fixes the eye of faith on the gracious Being who conducts him through the deep; and, in the very wreck and ruin of his hopes, he clings with eagerness to "*the Rock of his salvation.*"

The second sentiment, therefore, which rises in the midst of our religious contemplations, is that of trust in the goodness and mercy of God. This is the "*live*

*coal*" which is carried by a seraph from the altar, and rekindles our failing souls; and this is the voice of peace which assures us that our "*iniquity is taken away, and our sin purged.*" Wherever we look abroad through nature, we behold an universe rejoicing in the bounty of the Creator; to every thing its portion of bliss allotted; and the smallest insect that flutters in the sun-beam provided with the means of happiness, no less than the seraphims who sing the praises of the Lord of Hosts. Amidst this profusion of bounty, is man forgotten? and is that being who is made but a little lower than the angels, left to wretchedness and despair? If he has sinned, is there not mercy with the Most High? will God be angry for ever, and cast off, without hope of pardon, his wandering and prodigal son? Nature herself, my brethren, speaks to us of mercy with the

Most High: and her gentle voice sometimes whispers to us, with the seraph of the prophet, that our "*iniquity is taken away, and our sin purged.*" Revelation speaks to us in still more commanding words; and at that altar from which we have now risen, I trust we have heard a voice which will bring us peace and assurance for ever. We have there adored in gratitude and humility the mighty sacrifice of our redemption; and we have heard the words which say, "*If God gave us his only Son, will he not, with him, also give us all things?*"

Such are the contemplations into which our religion has lately introduced us, and such are the sentiments which must in some measure have arisen in all our hearts. From that altar we are now returning into the world; and having felt our weakness and infirmity, and having had our hearts reassur-

ed by the promises of the spirit of God, what remains for us to do? The prophet will tell us in the words which follow the text. "*Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I: send me.*" We have knelt down before the cross of Christ; we have felt the wounds of our consciences healed by the drops of his blood; and we are advancing, I trust with renewed spirits, into the dangers and the trials of the world. What, then, ought to be our principle of action? "*Here am I,* (says the prophet) *send me;*" or, in the language of a greater than the prophet, "*Lo, I come to do thy will, O God!*" At the altar of Christ, the glory of the Lord has been unveiled to us; and, raising our eyes above the things of time, we have beheld his train filling the temple of eternity. We have seen all things in heaven and in earth obeying

his will; from the sparrow, which falleth to the ground at his command, to the seraphim, who sing their eternal hymn, "*Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of his glory.*" We have seen the First-born himself bowing his head in death, to accomplish the will of the Father; yet, amidst all this grand display of the sovereignty of God, we have found, alas! our own hearts but too often rebels to his will. Abashed at his presence, and self-condemned, we have cried out, "*Woe is me, for I am undone:*" but in the midst of our humiliation and tears, the living flame of his love has touched our hearts, and the seraph of peace that hovers round the altar, has assured us that "*our iniquity is taken away,*" and now sends us back into the world, willing instruments in his hands.

In the world into which we are returning, temptations of different kinds will

again recur to mislead us. Some of us, probably, are returning into scenes of affliction, and may be tempted to murmur against the dispensations of heaven. Yet, my brethren, if such is the call of your Father; if it is into the scenes of sorrow that he sends you; still say with the prophet, "*Here am I.*" Forget not so soon the contemplations in which you have been engaged. Remember that the Master before whom you have now bowed, was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. You have lately risen from the view of his sufferings *, and have seen that he refused not the cup which his Father gave him to drink. Still more, you have seen the reward of his filial obedience. When the bitterness of death was past, you saw him restored to life and immortality: and you now are as-

* On Good Friday.

sured that, "*at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow.*" Learn from him to suffer; and the meekness of your patience will like his be rewarded, when sorrow shall be no more!

Many of us are returning into scenes of ease and prosperity. It is in these chiefly that we are likely to be misled. When the world smiles upon us, we are too ready to regard it as our "*abiding city*," and to conceive that we are left to our own disposal. We are then too apt to forget our duty to man, and our responsibility to God. Yet let not the truths, which this day* has recalled to your thoughts, be speedily dissipated. At the altar you have been told of better worlds. You have seen the Son of God rise from the grave in the form of a man; and you have heard him call you to raise

* Easter Sunday.

your ambition above the enjoyments of a temporary being. "*If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right-hand of God.*" "*Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.*"

Follow your master in all the paths of social duty; be willing ministers of good in the hands of your heavenly Father; ever say with the prophet, "*Here am I,*" wheresoever thou wilt, O God, "*send me.*" Thine I am, from the first moment in which my eyes were opened to the light, to that hour when they shall again be closed in death; and, through this fleeting circle of time, so enable me to do thy will in all the labours of love, that I may still be thine, when time shall be no more!

# SERMON XXV.

ON PUBLIC WORSHIP.

PSALM, c. 3.

"*Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bliss his name.*"

IT is a melancholy truth, that the occupations of life should possess the minds of men so entirely, as to leave them but little leisure for religious reflection. Although nothing can be a more certain truth, than that all the good which we either enjoy or hope for, is from God;

yet it is one which we are not apt to consider with attention, so as to awaken in our souls emotions of gratitude and piety. The institution of set times and places for worship must, accordingly, be acknowledged to be highly beneficial, since it affords an admirable opportunity for making a retreat from our common worldly business, and of fixing our thoughts on that unseen Benefactor, from whose hand are derived all the blessings of our lives. Yet the spirit of irreligion prevails so far, that men rather avoid these opportunities, than avail themselves of them; or even if they seem to lay hold of them, it is often with such a temper of mind as to derive no benefit from their recurrence.

There are two leading views from which a regular attention to public worship may be recommended; the spiritual improvement of the individual, and the good example which is thereby set to others. In

the first place, a proper attention to public worship contributes much to the spiritual improvement of the individual. The fact which I set out with stating is undeniable; that in the present life we are necessarily so much occupied with worldly concerns, as to render us on the whole inattentive to religious truth, and the concerns of futurity. This fleeting scene occupies all our thoughts; and our heads are too often laid in the grave, before we have seriously reflected, that the grave is the gate which opens on an eternal world. Of this, and all other religious truths, we frequently require to be reminded, and to have them impressed upon our reflections in such a form, that they may keep their hold amidst all the seductions of present things, and establish somewhat of a celestial temper within us, even while our souls are borne down and fettered by the incumbrance of our material frame.

The stated and regular worship of God is an admirable expedient for this purpose. When we "*enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise;*" when our souls are elevated to the contemplation of his invisible glory; when we awaken in our hearts sentiments of gratitude, and entreat with humility the continuance of his favour; when we are instructed from his holy word, and listen to those heavenly precepts which the divine teacher gave to the children of men; when we are so employed, the world will surely for a time retreat from our thoughts; and, feeling the full force of religious impressions, we shall be ready to exclaim, with the Patriarch of old, "*How dreadful is this place! this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!*"

I am aware, my brethren, that such sentiments may be only momentary, and

that, when we return into the world, the tide of human occupations and passions may carry us along with renewed force; yet something will always be apt to remain, some holy emotion, which may check the turbulence of unhallowed desire, or which may elevate the mind above the mean pursuits of avarice, or vulgar ambition. And, by frequently permitting such impressions to be repeated, a habit of piety, and of serious reflection, will be wrought into the soul, sufficient to bear it in triumph through the delusions of the world, and finally to convey it into that uninterrupted bliss, which awaits the good in the presence of their heavenly Father.

There is, indeed, a careless and inattentive manner of being present in form only, while the offices of religion are performed, which, so far from producing any improvement to the soul, rather tends to render it callous to all religious impres-

sions. It is not uncommon for men to imagine, that their duty to God is sufficiently fulfilled, if they merely attend in person the places appointed for his worship, without really applying their minds to prayer, or endeavouring to derive any instruction from the truths which they may hear delivered. These men, indeed, "*enter into the gates of God's house,*" but it is without "*thanksgiving and praise;*" without any disposition to honour their maker, or to be rendered capable of honouring him. It is unfair, however, to argue against the utility of religious institutions, from the small influence which they seem to possess over many of those who appear to treat them with due regard; because it often happens, that those men who seem the most zealous for religion, have yet never permitted their hearts to be affected with any genuine sentiments of piety,

and, "*having a form of godliness, they yet deny the power thereof.*"

That we may receive improvement in the courts of the Lord, it is indeed necessary that we should call to mind whose service it is in which we are employed; to remember that we are addressing him who is praised by the voice of angels and archangels; and that it is from the sincerity of our worship alone that our feeble voice can be thought worthy of joining in unison with theirs. When such are our impressions, and when we feel our devotion inflamed by sympathy with our surrounding brethren, the most thoughtless among us will, for a time at least, think soberly; and the wisest and best of us will return from the gates of the house of God, wiser and better than when he entered in.

The second view, from which this practice may be recommended, is under the

head of example, which applies chiefly to men of character and influence, whose conduct is remarked, and who are as "*cities set on a hill, that cannot be hid.*" There is no man, indeed, who may not have some influence, whose example will not probably be copied by some one or other. All parents are under strong obligations to set a good example to their children; all masters to their servants; but particularly men of station and rank to their inferiors everywhere around them. Now, a regular habit of attending public worship is a feature in the example of a good man, which has a wider and more beneficial influence than is commonly imagined; gives an impression of weight and dignity to his character, which it would otherwise want; and establishes the opinion, that he is actuated by nobler motives than the desire of popular favour, or any mere worldly consideration.

The lower orders of men, who at one time declaim against the profligacy of their superiors, and, at another, take comfort to themselves, in the midst of their own corruptions, when they see that they are only copying after their betters; these men look up with emotions of awe and reverence to the rich and powerful man who seems to carry the fear of God before his eyes; and, while he walks among them, they almost consider him as a superior being, commissioned by the Most High to regulate their conduct, to curb and restrain their vices, and to encourage their humble virtues. Impressions of this kind seize upon the imaginations of the populace, and have probably no slight influence in forming their manners. If, then, by the plain and easy practice of resorting to the house of God at the times appointed for his worship, a man of rank or fortune may

do more good among his dependants, or, those inferiors who watch his conduct, than by the profuse distribution of wealth, or even by well-formed schemes for the good and advancement of society, the observance of this practice becomes a most important branch, not only of his duty to God, but likewise of that which he owes to man.

These remarks, my brethren, are applicable to all times, but they are, perhaps, peculiarly so to the present age, which, whatever may be its advantages in point of knowledge, of refinement, and of humanity, is certainly far from being eminent for zeal in religion. Many opinions and sentiments which our fathers regarded with reverence, are now too often despised, and many practices which, in their apprehension, were characteristic of virtue and goodness, are now too frequently looked upon as the indications

of a weak and superstitious mind. Whatever advances our age has really made, whatever improvements in practice or opinion, no wise man assuredly will undervalue. Our sentiments have, in some respects, become more liberal, our views more enlarged, and our minds have been freed from some unworthy fetters, by which those of our fathers were tied down and enslaved. All this is right: these advantages it is our duty to preserve, and in all respects "*so to speak and so to do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.*"

But let us be very careful lest we ever mistake the spurious offspring of our vanity and self-conceit for the genuine fruits of an improving age; and whilst we condemn the frivolous observances frequent among "*those of old time,*" let us be cautious lest we shut our eyes to that lustre of true religion and piety that so often

shed a glory around their steps, which all our boasted knowledge and improvements seek to confer upon us in vain. Let us be cautious lest we ever despise that simple and unassuming wisdom, which led them to yield a ready and unforced obedience to every sacred institution, both as the mean of nurturing in their own bosoms the secret seeds of faith and virtue, and for the purpose of drawing more closely those unseen cords, which bind together in beautiful order the jarring elements of human society.

# SERMON XXVI.

ON YOUTHFUL PIETY.

ECCLESIASTES, xii. 1.

"*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth; while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.*"

THE young, my brethren, are too apt to consider religion as a dark and gloomy object. It seems to them calculated to check the sprightliness of their spirits, and to thwart the pursuit of their pleasures. If they have been educated by pious parents, they will, indeed, regard

it with reverence and awe; but still it may seem to them a bondage from which they will sometimes long to become free. The house of God is apt to appear to them cheerless and melancholy, and their thoughts will often wander from prayers and thanksgivings to the enticing scenes of gaiety and joy. This is a disposition inherent probably in some young minds, and which, therefore, is to be treated with some indulgence. Yet, in this disposition we may trace the first rise of irreligion in the heart; we may see those corrupted springs from which the waters of bitterness afterwards flow; and in that distaste to the thoughts of religion, as inconsistent with the pleasures of youth, we shall discover the root of infidelity in some minds, and, in others, of that eager following after vain enjoyments, which finally blots out every serious thought.

In order, therefore, to impress upon the minds of the young the belief that there is nothing severe in the advice of the wise man which I have chosen for my text, I shall endeavour to prove, first, that religion is so far from checking, that it will add a relish to every innocent pleasure which is natural to the season of youth; and, in the next place, to shew that youth is the season in which religion and pleasure may be most easily made to unite, "*while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.*"

Let us then consider the season of youth, and the innocent pleasures which it admits: that season when our limbs are strong; when our hearts are light; when our hopes are warm; and when we begin to run the race of life with alacrity and joy. Care has not yet sate down upon our minds; we have not yet expe-

rienced the vanity of the world, nor fallen a prey to discontent and repining. Every hour seems to start some new enjoyment, something that we have not yet known, which may add new vigour to our spirits, and refresh our hopes. Life does not yet appear the same unvaried circle of dull employment, or of insipid amusement. All is smiling and delightful; for the evil days have not yet come, nor the years drawn nigh, in which we shall say we have no pleasure in them. Now, my brethren, it would indeed be a harsh design, if religion advanced to throw a cloud over this pleasing period; if it hastened the arrival of the evil days instead of retarding them, or of breaking their force. If we were forbid to use the vigour of our limbs, if we were required to break down the cheerfulness of our spirits, and to tear from our hearts all love for those delights which are ever opening upon us,

we might, indeed, have some reason to complain that we served a severe master.

But religion never forbids the use of any thing which nature throws in our way. It only aims at checking the abuse. Our heavenly Father deals with us in no other way than every wise parent acts by his child. Every kind father is pleased to see his child sprightly and gay, enjoying the amusements and games of his childhood. Every wise father, however, checks his child in those amusements which he sees are hurtful; and although it may cost a few tears, yet is steady in enforcing obedience. Can we think it hard to be treated by our heavenly Father in the manner in which the wisest and best parents treat their children; and do we see those children which are wisely educated less lively and cheerful than those which are idly indulged?

Where, then, is the severity of the precept, "*remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth?*" what pleasures will it prevent; what delights will it destroy? Will it make the face of nature appear less beautiful in our eyes? will it make us have less delight in the society of our friends, or of those who possess our hearts? Does the child appear less sprightly in his play, who recollects that his father permits certain amusements and forbids others, than one who runs thoughtless into all kinds of mischief whenever he is beyond the paternal eye? "*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,*" and thou wilt, indeed, avoid the intemperate rioting of drunkenness, the insidious poison of loose debauchery, and all the other snares which lie in the path of youth; but wilt thou enjoy with less satisfaction the company of thy friend, or think with less delight on the mistress

of thy chaste affections, or engage with less animation in the different occupations which suit thy years? Every period of life has its peculiar duties and enjoyments; and religion does not expect in a young man all the composure and gravity of age. It, however, requires the young to be sober-minded, and not intemperately to give the reins to every eager desire. It requires the young as well as the old to remember that they are immortal beings, and that they will one day give an account of their works: but, under this caution it permits them to rejoice in their youth. "*Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the ways of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*"

So far is the remembrance of our Creato from being a hinderance to youthful pleasures, that it must clearly add to them, and give them a higher relish. The child that amuses himself under his father's smiles surely enjoys a greater happiness than when he fears to be interrupted in forbidden delights, and to be subject to his frowns and displeasure. Must it not add to the lawful pleasures of youth, when we believe that the great Father of our spirits permits them a free scope, and delights to see the happiness of his children, while they confine themselves within the gracious rules of his administration? Will not the belief that we enjoy his approbation cheer us under every restraint; and if we must at times submit to his chastisement, shall we not kiss the rod, and still acknowledge his paternal love? Let us not, my brethren, form to ourselves a dark and gloomy no-

tion of the God who made us, but let us regard him as the Father of mercies, as the most mild and gracious of all beings. "*Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame: he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass, as a flower of the field so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children, to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.*"

Let us, in the second place, proceed to enforce the argument of the wise man, by which he recommends early piety: it is drawn from the consideration of the difficulty of becoming pious at any after period of life, if we have neglected the re-

membrance of our Creator in the days of our youth. While we are young, and enjoy life, we feel that it is a good, and we can be thankful for it; and if we have attained the disposition of thankfulness in our youth, we can retain it when the evil days come, knowing, that although there is little pleasure in them, yet they are the lot of humanity; and that, if we bear up under their inconveniences with patience and resignation, we shall in no case lose our reward. But if our religious sentiments are to be first formed in the decay of our years, when the time of pleasure is over, and life wears a dismal and fading aspect, the task must evidently be hard, and contrary to the bent of our nature. When we have wasted our youth in intemperance, and have lost the cheerful flow of our spirits, and carry about with us a weary and worn-out mind, where is there room for those warm affections of

the heart, without which our religion must be lame and imperfect? How can we, when our decaying frames, the wrecks, perhaps, of our intemperance and folly, seem rather to be monuments of God's indignation, than examples of his love; how can we then begin, for the first time, to lift our souls in gratitude to him, and to thank him for that goodness which we can with difficulty persuade ourselves that we have ever experienced?

If we do become religious in our old age, while we have neglected our Creator in our youth, our religion will be founded rather on fear than on love, and we shall look up to the Author of our being rather as a severe master, whom we must serve, than as a kind father, whose commandments are given for his children's good. The religion which first begins in the midst of the evil days, will partake of all the gloom and melancholy of the season

which gives it birth; and, instead of being the solace and comfort of that declining period, will, perhaps, but cover it over with darker clouds. And yet it is evident, that old age can only be truly cheerful if it is religious. Confidence in God alone can break the force of those storms which will then probably assail us. The young may enjoy, for a time, a life of pleasure, without the thought of virtue and holiness. The warmth, the flow, the alacrity of their spirits may carry them through much dissipation, without great weariness, or much perception that "*all is vanity.*" But the old, tottering on the brink of the grave, with weakened bodies and weary minds, what, O God, can give peace and comfort to them, but the belief that thou art with them, and that thou wilt never forsake them? And how can they have this happy confidence, if, instead of looking back on a well-spent life, past in thy

service, and directed by thee, they behold all their early years a vain scene of vice and disorder, and that they have only had recourse to thy protection, when all besides had failed them?

If, then, we are desirous, at any time of our lives, to enjoy the blessings of religion; if, when the pleasures of the world have failed us, when our eyes are dim, and our strength decayed, and we have outlived the companions of our youth, and are travelling on to the grave in solitude and silence; if, at this dreary period, when we are in the midst of the evil days, we would still possess a friend, "*who sticketh closer than a brother;*" who can infuse into our hearts the truest comfort, and be a staff to our feet, and light to our eyes, let us "*remember our Creator in the days of our youth.*" God forbid that I should suppose he may not be found at any time by those who sin-

cerely seek him; and, even although we have been misled by youthful passions, and have neglected his service in our best days, that yet he will not accept of our sincere repentance, when the evil days have come. But, surely, repentance is much easier while our transgressions are few, than when they are multiplied; the wound can surely be more easily healed when it is fresh, than when it has rankled and become a sore.

It is impossible, too, not to perceive the gross impropriety of devoting that time only to the service of our Maker, which is the most inefficient, and of the least value in our existence. In pouring out the cup of life, shall we set apart the *dregs* only for the great Master of the feast? Shall our evil days alone be dedicated to that bounty from which all the days of our years are derived, and no part of our pleasant days also? Is it thus that our

Creator ought to be remembered? and can so preposterous a scheme of religion lead to any thing like consistent happiness? In vain, then, my brethren, will you attempt to postpone those duties which are ever soliciting your attention, or to defer, till "*a more convenient season*," that service in which you can never be too early engaged, and which, when you are heartily engaged in it, you will indeed feel to be "perfect freedom."

# SERMON XXVII.

## ON REDEEMING TIME*.

EPHESIANS, v. 16.

"*Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*"

THERE are times, my brethren, when the solemn admonitions of religion fall upon our minds with a peculiar force. Such, for instance, is the season of affliction, when we are made feelingly to apprehend the instability of all human en-

* Preached January 1st 1808.

joyments. When the days of our lives are evil, we become detached from the common delusions which betray us, and are disposed to listen to the voice from heaven, which calls upon us to "*redeem the time*," and to regulate the remainder of our days on the principles of virtue and of wisdom.

It is not, however, in the hour of affliction alone, that our minds are awakened to sober and serious thought. There are times interposed by the bounty of Providence, when, without the severe discipline of suffering, the most thoughtless are naturally called to reflection; when the young check, for a moment, the boundless career of hope, and when the old rouse themselves from the slumber of forgetfulness, in which the long habit of existence has involved them. Such is the season of the departing year, when an unbroken portion of time, through which we

have lately passed, is at once presented to our view; and when our thoughts run back to the recollection of the similar periods which were formerly allotted us, and forward to the uncertain anticipation of those which we may yet hope to enjoy, before the termination of our course upon earth. The moment, my brethren, is one of tender feeling, and of serious reflection; and the state of mind which it produces is favourable to those exalted sentiments which detach us from mortality, and invigorate our steps in that sublime path, the termination of which is in heaven. I need not, therefore, apologize for requesting your attention, at this time, to a few of those reflections which moments, such as the present, naturally call forth.

One of the first recollections which presents itself to us, when we look back upon the years that are past, is the remem-

brance of those friends and companions, whose society constituted their principal charm. From some of these we have since been separated, by their or our misconduct; from others by absence, and the different accidents of human life; from more, perhaps, by death. Those among us who have lived the longest in the world, must have the greatest number of such melancholy, but tender recollections; and, from the summit of their advanced years, must behold the fleeting forms of their dearest connections passing in shadowy review before them. To the youngest among us, however, some such remembrances must occur; some youthful companion, or some venerable parent, of whom death has deprived them for ever. There are, indeed, few who have advanced beyond the period of infancy, whose years have not carried them through some "*evil days*;" through some of those afflic-

tions, which are the portion of our nature, which leave a deep trace in the heart, and which improve while they wound it. The recollections are mournful, but they are salutary; they carry "*healing on their wings,*" and they advance, with every revolving year, to restrain, with gentle force, the impetuosity of our passions, or to rouse the soul from its slumbers.

They tell us, first of all, that the kind affections of our nature are those which leave the most durable impressions; that all occupations in which these are not engaged, are in some respect foreign from our hearts, and do not voluntarily present themselves to our memory; and that it is only when he loves, and is beloved, that man accomplishes the purpose of his being. They tell us farther, that this purpose can never meet with its full accomplishment on earth; that the "*time and chance which*

*happen to all things,*" interrupt likewise the course of our tenderest affections; and that, in the ruins of winter, with which the departing year surrounds him, man is not only called to mourn the decay of nature, but, it may be, the loss of all which kindled the glow of love in his heart. They tell us, finally, not to grieve, like those who have no hope: in the memory of departed love and virtue, the prophecy of immortality is involved; and when we call to mind the forms of those whose kind offices were the solace of our early years, or whose virtues animated our youthful emulation, we feel that we are not conversing with the dead, but with "*the spirits of the just made perfect.*" While these recollections inform us, that there is a winter of mortality over which our tears have fallen, they point at the same time to an eternal spring, when every tear shall be wiped away; and they

leave us inspired with the high and holy ambition to "*redeem the time*" which we have lost, and to be no longer "*slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience have inherited the promises.*"

In the second place, my brethren, when we look back upon our departed years, we naturally consider in what manner we have been employed in their course. In a review of this kind, the best among us will be conscious, that they "have left undone many things which they ought to have done, and have done many things which they ought not to have done." They will wonder, indeed, at the apparent vacuity which they have left behind them; at the small number of good actions which rise among the crowd of such as either are pernicious or insignificant. At the same time, they will feel that their good actions are those alone which they can have much satisfaction in recollect-

ing; that they are as lamps which shed a consoling beam upon the darkness which surrounds them; and while they would willingly forget some part of their conduct, and are indifferent to the recollection of the greater part, they can pause, with a tranquil sentiment of enjoyment, on those deeds of light which have distinguished their path. While the years that are past bring them the sad remembrance of friends whom they have lost, they bring them likewise the soothing information, that the good which they have done has made them other friends; and that, although the tenderest strings of their hearts may have been torn and shattered, yet the cord which binds them to the family of mankind may still be strengthened, without the hazard of being broken!

How important, then, the lesson which the memory of departed years may bring

even to the good! How plainly may it shew them, that the course upon which they have entered is the course which leads to the happiness of their nature; and how strongly will it teach them, that, if they cannot yet look back with entire satisfaction on that part of it which they have run, it is only because their exertions hitherto have been unsteady, and that they may yet advance towards higher perfection? To those who are wandering far from the path appointed for man; who, in the recollections of the years that are gone, find a melancholy vacuity of "*virtue*," and of "*praise*;" whose scattered deeds of light only render more conspicuous the horror of the gloom which they serve to disclose; whose labours of love and of duty are smothered in the prevailing selfishness of their hearts; to such men, the season which now departs from them speaks in the language

of authority and reproof. It calls them to task for that scene of desolation which it is forced to present to their eyes; it asks them if such is the spectacle which ought to be presented to a moral and an immortal being; and whether, in the loss of friends, in the wreck of their reputation, and in the increasing wounds of their spirits, they find no motives which may stimulate them to the exertion requisite for "*redeeming the time.*" The season which has gone, points with a prophetic finger to that which is now beginning its course, and shews them "*the little cloud,*" which may now seem, "*like a man's hand,*" accumulating a deeper gloom, till it covers the heavens with blackness. It then points to a brighter prospect, to the glorious effect of firm and holy resolution; to the clouds withdrawing from the opening sky of virtue; to "*the Sun of righteousness, rising with healing on his wings;*" and

to that spring of returning peace which, more than the spring of the year, will brighten to the eye of penitence the fair form of creation, and will confer a new lustre on the beauties of earth and of heaven!

From the recollection of former years, we naturally, in the third place, look forward to those which are to come. In the years which are gone, we all behold the forms of those whom we loved, and whose place on earth knows them no more; we now behold them bending down to us from the regions of light, and calling upon us to walk in their steps. In the same years, we behold the line of our own conduct in many respects fluctuating and uncertain; in the best men, often deviating into error, and, in many, far indeed removed from the path of virtue and honour.—These years are gone for ever, and they

can now be of service to us, only if they leave wisdom behind them. If the remembrance of our first and earliest affections restores to us, in some measure, the youthful simplicity of our hearts; if the memory of the wise and good, who were once with us on earth, revive in our souls the decaying flame of wisdom and virtue, these holy recollections will be productive of immortal fruits. If the errors and omissions of our former years make us cautious against future failings; if the sense of our imperfect exertions quicken our determination to amend; if, shocked with the form and the consequences of vice, we now firmly resolve to persevere in the road of virtue, the departing year will not have addressed us in vain; and that year which is now opening upon us, will usher in the "*redeeming of our time.*" Whether, in its progress, our heads are laid in the dust, or whether it is the prelude to

a longer course of usefulness and honour, we shall then equally live or die to God, in whose "*hand our times are.*" To those who will be wise now, the time which is before them will, under the Providence of heaven, be sufficient for accomplishing the work which they have to do: but to those who still delay, who reject the time of their acceptance, no promises are made, and "*this night their souls may be required of them.*"

The uncertainty of the time which is to come, may be one of the circumstances which the Apostle had in view, when he tells us "*the days are evil;*" and gives this as a motive for activity in "*redeeming the time.*" There are, at the same time, other circumstances to which the expression may be more strictly applicable. He might have in view the habits of increasing years, which render a retreat from evil always more difficult, and tend to be-

numb the soul in the hardness and insensibility of sin. He might allude to the infirmities of life, which increase upon us with our years, and which may bring us suffering and pain, before we have formed the habits of religious fortitude. He might perhaps have more particularly in view the "*evils of the days*" in which he lived; the persecutions to which the first Christians were subject; and the speedy call which might be made upon them, to summon up every principle of their faith, for the hour of torture or of death. To all these circumstances, except the last, it is always our wisdom to direct our thoughts; and to learn from them that prudence which seizes upon the present hour, and puts not off the season of reformation to an hour which may never come, or which may come in vain.

To the last of these circumstances, however, our thoughts, perhaps, may at this day be more naturally directed, than in any former period of our lives; and when we contemplate the portentous aspect of the world around us, we too shall be apt to feel with the Apostle, that we have "fallen upon evil days." It has been our lot, my brethren, to live in a period of fluctuation and change; to witness the downfal of empires which were mighty in the days of "our fathers and in the old times before them;" and to see the sceptre of earthly dominion pass into the hands of those, whose fathers were unknown in the records of nations. We have beheld the appalling spectacle of the establishments of ancient power giving way at the touch of upstart violence: and the proud ones of the earth bending their regal fronts at the imperious nod of a plebeian conqueror. Year

after year, as it passes, adds some new touches to the deeply-coloured picture of human mutability; and now * even the winds and the waves have been entrusted with the fortunes of kings, as more to be depended on than the faithless shores of their paternal sway.

We have hitherto, it is true, been spectators merely of this shifting scene; and while the political interests of our country have been deeply involved in the fates of surrounding nations, we have sate in quiet in the dwellings of our fathers, and listened to the howling of the distant storm. Yet year after year brings the contest nearer to ourselves; the last mortal struggle between overwhelming oppression and indignant freedom. The "*evil days*" of blood and desolation, which have brought upon the earth "*distress*

* Emigration of the Portuguese Court.

*of nations, with perplexity; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth;"* seem at last to be gathering over our heads; and in the hours which are now approaching, there may be required, from every one of us, no slight exercise of virtue, and no vulgar firmness of faith. The time may be on its wing, when every moral and Christian principle must be exerted for our *national* salvation, and when we too must fall under the powers of darkness, unless we are clad in *"the armour of light."*

At the close of the last year, we bowed before the throne of a spiritual conqueror, who came into the world, not to destroy, but to save. Let us begin the present year, with the firm resolution to redeem the time which we have given to other masters, and henceforth to obey his salutary laws; so shall we be clothed

with the strength of his spirit; so shall we be nobly prepared for whatever exigence we may be doomed to encounter; so alone shall we be conveyed in safety through the passing tumults of time; so alone shall we enter with joy the tranquil haven of eternity!

# SERMON XXVIII.

## RELIGIOUS MEDITATIONS.

### REV. i. 8.

*"I am the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."*

THESE words, my brethren, elevate our thoughts to the highest contemplation of which our nature is capable. They lift us at once above all that is little and all that is great upon earth, and carry us into the presence of that Being "*who inhabiteth eternity.*" The contemplation may

appear, perhaps, too lofty for our faculties, and may seem to remove us from the present sphere of our knowledge and of our duties; yet, if we enter upon it with due humility, and seek not to "*be wise beyond what is written*," beyond what is written on the hearts of men and in the revelations of God, we shall be sensible that those high meditations, while they afford a sublime occupation to the mind, are likewise productive of reflections useful for the conduct of life.

"*I am the beginning* (saith the Lord), *which was*." Our imagination is here carried back to a time when the visible frame of creation was not yet unfolded; when all the glories of earth and of heaven had not yet a being; and when that order of things which we call nature was not yet ordained. But while these magnificent arrangements of existence were not, there was one from whom they all

have been derived; and however far imagination may go back, while the earth and the heavens vanish from its eye, it still beholds the great Universal Spirit presiding in the immensity of his own essence.

The next object which presents itself to our thoughts is the creation of the universe, when "*the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the deep;*" when God said "*let there be light, and there was light;*" when the sun began to run his race; when "*the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.*" We now behold the earth peopled with innumerable living creatures, and one of a more erect form, and of a nobler nature, placed among them as their lord. From this period we follow the history of man; and while we witness with regret the "*many inventions*" which he has found out for himself; his constant deviations

from those pure laws which his Maker had established for him, we look up with delight to the great Father interposing in the behalf of his wandering offspring, and rejoice to see the fair fruits of virtue and happiness, which, amidst all the corruptions of man, have been produced under the fostering dew of heaven, in the harvest of human nature. To some he sent prophets, to some apostles; some were instructed by the light of nature, and at last "*he spoke to man by his Son.*"

It is a great and a gratifying reflection, that there has never been a period of the history of man which has not been transacted under the eye of God; that he who was from the beginning, has beheld every step which his children have made; and that his good spirit has ever been with them, calling them on into the ways of perfection. It is interesting to recognize this bond of union connect-

ing the human race from their first origin to the present hour; to think that the God who now beholds us was the God of our fathers, and that "*the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob*" is still the Lord of the whole earth.

"*I am he* (saith the Lord) *which is.*" When we look back to the beginning, my brethren, we see a universe bursting into existence. The creation of things is a work which astonishes the imagination, and we instantly acknowledge the Maker in the glory of the work. When we read, too, in the pages of sacred history, we are struck with the relation of astonishing interpositions of the divine power; and when we are informed of a path opened through the sea, or of food rained from heaven, or of a dead man raised to life, we immediately recognize, in those miraculous occurrences, the hand of the Deity. It is only amidst the regu-

larity and order of nature, while no change is made, while nothing is presented to rouse the imagination, while all things are as they have been from the beginning, that we ever forget there is a God, and are tempted to say with the scoffer, "*where is the promise of his coming?*" But this very regularity and constancy of nature is the proof that God is; that he ever possesses the same power and the same wisdom; that in him there is "*no variableness nor shadow of turning*," and that "*he slumbers not nor sleeps.*"

"*I am he* (saith the Lord) *which is.*" Does thy inattention or thy impiety, O man! overlook this truth? Art thou insensible to the present Deity? Dost thou shut thine eyes to the aspect of nature, or seest thou no traces of his providence in the course of human affairs? Do the disorders of the moral world confound thee, and do the miseries of na-

tions cloud from thy view the beneficence of God? Yet, does not the sun still rise in the heavens, and continue his annual course, and bring the vicissitudes of seasons, and the grateful interchange of night and day? Or if the book of providence is dark, yet, has not "*the Sun of righteousness*" risen upon the earth; and, amidst all the guilt and the miseries of mankind, does not he shed "*healing from his wings?*"

While the profane or the superstitious require some unusual excitement of the imagination before they can be roused to a sense of the divine presence, the man of true piety and reflection feels that he is never removed from his Father's eye: that, wherever he goes, God is with him; and that the same Spirit which at first called into existence all the orders of being, and which has since superintended and guided the progress of the human

race, is still watching over his children, and gathering them under the wings of his love.

"*I am the ending* (saith the Lord) *which is to come.*" We have beheld, my brethren, the great Universal Spirit hovering over the universe which he has created, from the first moment of time to the present hour. The present hour is short; our time is on its wing; and the day will shortly arrive when we too shall be numbered with those who have been. It is natural for man to look beyond his own little sphere, and to listen to the voice which says, "*come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.*" The only ground on which our predictions of futurity can rest is this, that whatever changes there may be, God is to come; and that, under his eye, the great scheme of Providence will go on and prosper till all shall be accom-

plished. It is pleasing, under this belief, to meditate on the mighty things which will be transacted upon earth after our heads are laid in the dust; on all the improvements which will be made by the future races of men; and on that slow but steady course of divine providence, by which man will at last arrive at the perfection predicted by the prophet, when *"the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."*

*"I am the ending"* (saith the Lord). The time will come when this earth and all its inhabitants will be removed, and when a new heaven and a new earth will appear. *"There will be no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God shall lighten it, and the Lamb shall be the light thereof."*

Such are some of those lofty contemplations which the words of the text may suggest to us. They are evidently the

highest contemplations of our nature, and to some, perhaps, they may seem to transport the mind of man beyond the present humble sphere of his duties. It is indeed true that our present part is an humble one; and religion, when rightly understood, will never carry us into meditations which are beyond the reach of our limited views. But the error into which men are so apt to fall, of confining their thoughts too closely to the little scene before them, without connecting it in their imaginations with those things which have gone before, and with the things which must be hereafter; this vulgar error it is the great office of Religion to correct; and she delights to point out that more extended range of contemplation which will, indeed, elevate us somewhat above our common pursuits or enjoyments, but never above our duties. There cannot, on the contrary, be a

greater call to the faithful and strenuous discharge of every duty, however apparently little and unnoticed, than the persuasion that we are ever in the eye of the Greatest of Beings, of him "*who is, and was, and is to come, the Almighty.*"

Another consideration, my brethren, the highest and most sublime which our nature can reach, is suggested likewise by these contemplations. It is, that as God is to come, man shall not perish; that, as the grave is subject to the power of Omnipotence, the time will come when the souls which it confines will be set free; and that those beings who were endowed with capacity to find out their Maker, will never lose in death the tie which bound them to him. This persuasion, to which nature leads us, and which the Gospel confirms, levels at once all the little distinctions of time, and pla-

ces every rank and condition of human life on a great and glorious equality.

Art thou high in place and power among men? Then waste not thy short and fleeting day in the folly of pomp and pride. There is one to come, the Almighty, before whom all thy petty advantages will vanish "*like the chaff before the wind.*" If, in that day, thou wouldst stand before him, "*do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with him.*"

Art thou in low estate, and dost thou sometimes repine that there are men whom fortune has raised above thee; Are there, then, no duties suited to thy station? Dost not thou, too, act in the sight of one who values equally thy condition with that of the [illegible]iest ruler of nations, in the sight of him "*who was and who is;*" and is he not likewise "*to come;*" and is there not a day coming in which he will reward thee if thou dost well?

These are the most useful reflections to which we can accustom our minds, as well as the greatest and the most glorious. Let us not lose them, therefore, in the insignificance of worldly things, nor quit our portion in the inheritance of that true "*liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.*"

THE END.

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